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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

THE DRAMATIC ROLE OF PERCUSSION IN SELECTED OPERAS OF BENJAMIN BRITTEN

by

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A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

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DEPARTMENT OF MUSIC

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled The Dramatic Role of Percussion in Selected Operas of Benjamin Britten submitted by Gillian Mary Sanderson in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Music in Musicology.

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the dramatic uses of percussion in Benjamin Britten's three types of opera: full-scale opera, chamber opera, and church parables. The discussion is limited to three works chosen to represent each group. These are Peter Grimes, A Midsummer Night's Dream, and Death in Venice from the full-scale operas; The Rape of Lucretia, Albert Herring, and The Turn of the Screw from the chamber operas; and, all three church parables, Curlew River, The Burning Fiery Furnace, and The Prodigal Son. A preliminary survey traces the chronological development of Britten's percussion writing through his non-staged works. Examination of the representative operas demonstrates Britten's method of using pitched and unpitched instruments to enhance the text, characters, and plots of his sung dramas. Throughout his career, the increase in number, variety, and emphasis of percussion instruments is shown in his instrumental, vocal, and operatic compositions. His choice of percussion includes ancient and medieval instruments, household utensils, and especially invented instruments, in addition to the more conventional members of the percussion ensemble. Techniques and tone-colours from other cultures are used, such as the Japanese hogaku and Balinese gamelan. A progressively complex use of percussion is shown from an early reliance on the membranophones to the later pre-eminence of

metallophones and melodic percussion. The function of percussion evolves from the representation of realistic effects in the early works to the communication of symbolic meaning in the later works. Britten's exploratory use of different instruments, timbres, rhythms, and techniques transformed the percussion ensemble from its traditional role of support into a principal vehicle of dramatic expression.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
	LIST OF MUSICAL EXAMPLES	viii
	LIST OF TABLES	xii
	LIST OF PLATES AND FIGURES	xiii
	INTRODUCTION	1
I	A SURVEY OF PERCUSSION IN BRITTEN'S NON-STAGED WORKS	6
II	PERCUSSION IN THREE FULL-SCALE OPERAS	51
	Peter Grimes	51
	The Interludes	53
	The Vocal Music	64
	The Dances	74
	A Midsummer Night's Dream	77
	The Instrumental Music	81
	The Vocal Music	86
	Death in Venice	92
III	PERCUSSION IN THREE CHAMBER OPERAS	110
	The Instrumental Music	116
	The Rape of Lucretia	117
	Albert Herring	121
	The Turn of the Screw	124
	The Vocal Music	132
IV	SYMBOLIC PERCUSSION IN THE CHURCH PARABLES	147
V	CONCLUSION	175
	BIBLIOGRAPHY AND DISCOGRAPHY	179

LIST OF MUSICAL EXAMPLES

Example		Page
1.	Dance of Death, fourth Song from Our Hunting Fathers.	11
2.	Dies Irae, page 51 of Sinfonia da Requiem.	17
3.	Dies Irae, page 52 of Sinfonia da Requiem.	18
4.	Opening bars of Purcell's theme in The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra.	21
5.	Xylophone part in Variation M.	23
6.	Saint Nicolas' prayer.	25
7.	Percussion ritornello, Spring Symphony.	27
8.	Timpani obbligato in Nocturne, Op. 60.	29
9.	Recurring theme for Glockenspiel and Tubular Bells, first movement of Cantata Academica.	31
10.	Sanctus from the War Requiem.	35
11.	Libera Me from the War Requiem.	37
12.	Representation of the Gun in the War Requiem.	38
13.	Cadenza linking third and fourth movements, Cello Symphony.	40
14.	The Opening of Children's Crusade.	44
15.	Seaspray effect in Interlude 1. Peter Grimes.	54
16.	Opening bars of Interlude II (timpani, lower strings only).	56
17.	Paired percussion in the "Storm" interlude.	57
18.	Peter's "Fate" motive, Act II, scene i.	60

Example		Page
19.	Passacaglia: statement of the ground by timpani.	60
20.	Harp and Gong, statement 15 of the passacaglia.	61
21.	Xylophone indicating reflected light, Interlude V.	63
22.	Timpani ostinato in the Round, "Old Joe."	65
23.	Solo timpani in recitative, Act I, scene i.	67
24.	Unmeasured melisma with timpani roll, Act II, scene ii.	68
25.	Storm rhythm by timpani, chorus Act I.	70
26.	Solo Celesta at the Boy's death, Act II, scene ii.	71
27.	Hobson's drum and Chorus, Act II, scene i.	73
28.	Barn Dance, Clarinet and Percussion.	75
29.	Ritornello in Act II. A Midsummer Night's Dream.	83
30.	"Tongs and Bones" Stage music, Act II.	86
31.	Oberon's spell theme on celesta. Act I.	88
32.	Fairies' lullaby for Tytania, Act I.	89
33.	The Glockenspiel as the disappearing Moon, Act III.	90
34.	Vibraphone's entry, scene iv, Death in Venice.	96
35.	Tadzio's theme.	97
36.	Condensed theme with xylophone solo, Boys' dance, scene xiv.	97
37.	Gamelan Music, scene vii.	99
38.	Increased texture conveys Tadzio's action, scene v.	100
39.	Tremoli indicate Aschenbach's anxiety, scene ix.	101
40.	Melodic percussion, climax of the fight, scene xvii.	102

Example		Page
41.	Quasi-melodic drums, the Traveller, scene i.	103
42.	Quasi-melodic drums with gamelan music, scene v.	104
43.	Dionysian drums, scene xiii.	105
44.	Drums with brushes imitate boat's engine, scene ii.	107
45.	Laughing song, percussive and vocal syncopation, scene x.	108
46.	The Rape of Lucretia: Percussion solo with four instruments. Act II, scene i.	114
47.	Albert Herring: Percussion solo with three instruments. Act I, Interlude.	115
48.	The Turn of the Screw: Percussion solo with four instruments. Act I, scene i.	116
49.	The Rape of Lucretia: Drum rhythms, Tarquinius' Ride, Act I, Interlude.	119
50.	Albert Herring: Timpani in Interlude, Act II.	123
51.	Twelve-tone set of The Turn of the Screw.	125
52.	The Turn of the Screw: Syncopated rhythm for three drums, Variation IV.	126
53.	The Turn of the Screw: Quint's motive on celesta.	127
54.	The Turn of the Screw: Timpani cadenza in Variation VIII.	128
55.	The Turn of the Screw: Permutation of the theme by tubular bells, Variation IX.	129
56.	The Turn of the Screw: Side drum mimicking Quint's Sprechstimme, Variation XII.	130
57.	Albert Herring: Timpani imitates Albert's question, Act I, scene ii.	139
58.	The Turn of the Screw: Celesta indicates Quint's first appearance, scene iv.	142

Example		Page
59.	The Turn of the Screw: Ground of the Passacaglia, Act II, scene viii.	145
60.	Curlew River: Japanese drum technique.	158
61.	The Prodigal Son: Drums indicating Elder Son's anger.	160
62.	The Prodigal Son: Two types of taiko-style drum technique, played on a small suspended cymbal.	167
63.	Drum ostinato in robing ceremonies.	168
64.	The Burning Fiery Furnace: Woodblocks in the dance of the Entertainers.	170
65.	The Burning Fiery Furnace: Gamelan-style processional march.	173
66.	The Prodigal Son: Conical gourd-rattle, the Son's journey home.	174

LIST OF TABLES

Table		Page
1	Selected Operas with Numbers of Different Percussion Instruments in each.	4
2	Structure of Instrumental Entries in The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra.	22
3	Percussion Instruments in Children's Crusade.	43
4	Scoring for A Midsummer Night's Dream.	79
5	Characteristics of the three groups in A Midsummer Night's Dream.	80
6	Percussion Scoring in Death in Venice.	95
7	Scoring in Three Chamber Operas.	112
8	Percussion Scoring in Three Chamber Operas.	113
9	Scoring of the Church Parables.	153
10	Chronological Order of Selected Operas.	177

LIST OF PLATES AND FIGURES

Plate		Page
1	Percussive effects in the film Night Mail.	8
2	Harp, bell, chimes, recorder, vielle, and positive organ. Illustration from a late eleventh-century Bible.	156
3	Two bronze sistra. Egyptian, late period, after 850 B.C.	163
4	Conical gourd-rattle constructed for The Prodigal Son.	165
5	Percussion instruments in The Burning Fiery Furnace, from Blades, Drum Roll, plate 31.	171

Figure		
1	Bass drum with variable pitch, Children's Crusade.	46

INTRODUCTION

In 1913 Igor Stravinsky shocked the artistic circles of Paris with the cataclysmic first performance of Le Sacre du printemps. The work's pounding rhythms and strong percussive emphasis marked a turning point in musical composition. In Italy in the same year, Luigi Russolo (1885 - 1947) issued his manifesto on Futurism, a movement which stressed the significance of rhythm, suppressed the melodic instruments, and granted a monopoly to percussion.[1] These two apparently unrelated events, practical and theoretical, chart a path for the continued exploration of the percussion ensemble during the twentieth century. One of the major composers who followed this path was Benjamin Britten, born in the same year of 1913. Although Britten was never the extreme radical that Stravinsky was, his music nevertheless has certain stylistic aspects in common with that of the older master. The works of both composers are distinguished by their clarity of texture, rhythmic and metric freedom, economical orchestration, and painstaking craftsmanship.

Considered by the avant-garde as reactionary and by the reactionaries as too avant-garde, Britten constantly expanded the

---

[1] Luigi Russolo, L'Arte dei Rumori (The Art of Noises), see Larry Vanlandingham, "The Percussion Ensemble: 1930 - 1945." Percussionist IX (Spring, 1972):71. For further information on this neglected innovator, who influenced Stravinsky, Honegger, Varèse, Milhaud, and Ravel, see Michael Kirby, Futurist Performance (New York: Dutton, 1971), Chap. V, also John C.G. Waterhouse, "A Futurist Mystery," Music and Musicians XV (April, 1967):26-30.

scope and techniques of the varied genres in which he composed. His total output of approximately 143 original published works can be grouped into six main categories. These consist of Stage Works, Orchestral Works, Solo Voice(s) with accompaniment, Choral Works, Instrumental Works (solo, ensemble, and chamber music), and Music for Children. These broad categories, however, give an inadequate impression of the variety of his style, which in fact is characterized by a reluctance to be bound by traditional forms of any kind.

Britten used innovative forms in each of the above categories. For example, the stage work Let's make an opera (1949) includes an opera within itself, The Little Sweep, brought into being with the assistance of the audience. Likewise, in his opera A Midsummer Night's Dream (1960), the third act contains a miniature opera buffa which satirizes nineteenth-century romantic operatic conventions. The church parables consist of three works which synthesize the forms of medieval mystery play, Japanese Noh theatre, and opera into a new genre. Even up to the time of his death in 1976, Britten was still trying out new combinations of instruments and voices and exploring different methods by which they may be made to interact.

This attitude of constant experimentation is clearly revealed by Britten's use of percussion throughout his career. In his works one can see an increasing emphasis upon this aspect. One need only compare the limited selection and use of percussion instruments in Our Hunting Fathers (1936) with Children's Crusade (1968). This "ballad for children's voices and orchestra" features an orchestra which comprises little more than a variety of percussion instruments.

In the introduction to the 1974 recording of Britten's last opera, Death in Venice, Donald Mitchell proposed a strong case for studying the developing use of percussion in Britten's work. He concludes: "It could be the subject for a whole study in its own right, just to trace the evolution of this particular component in Britten's music."[2] This thesis is a partial response to his suggestion. After a summary of Britten's use of percussion in the non-staged works, the study concentrates on representative examples from each of the three types of his staged works--the full scale operas, the chamber operas, and the church parables.

In choosing the particular operas to be included in this study, an attempt was made to select those works which would offer a broad view of Britten's style at different periods of his career. The operas therefore represent his early, middle, and late periods in each category (there are only three church parables, so they are all included). The chosen operas also indicate contrasting styles of writing between the tragic (Peter Grimes, The Rape of Lucretia, The Turn of the Screw, Death in Venice), and the humorous (Albert Herring, A Midsummer Night's Dream), and those with religious themes (Curlew River, The Burning Fiery Furnace, The Prodigal Son). In the later works of these nine operas, there occurs a marked increase in the number and type of percussion instruments used, as shown on the following page in Table 1:

---

[2] Donald Mitchell, "An Introduction to Death in Venice," Booklet for Benjamin Britten, Death in Venice, with the English Chamber Orchestra, conducted by Steuart Bedford (London OSA 13109, 1974), p. 8.

TABLE 1

SELECTED OPERAS WITH NUMBERS OF DIFFERENT PERCUSSION INSTRUMENTS IN EACH

Full-scale:	Peter Grimes (1945) ..... 13 A Midsummer Night's Dream (1960) . 15 Death in Venice (1973) 25
Chamber:	The Rape of Lucretia (1946) ..... 9 Albert Herring (1947) ..... 13 The Turn of the Screw (1954) 12
Church Parables:	Curlew River (1964) ..... 3 The Burning Fiery Furnace (1966) . 7 The Prodigal Son (1968) 11

In these operas, a total of forty different percussion instruments are used: sixteen of these are of the pitched variety and twenty-four are unpitched. Britten's growing interest in percussion is shown by the expanding role given to this component in relation to the other instruments in the overall musical texture; by the introduction in the later works of more unusual instruments (such as handbells, vibraphone, sistrum, and anvil); and by his increasingly specific directions for particular instruments. On several occasions James Blades had to construct special instruments in order to fulfill Britten's requirements.

Britten seldom wrote or spoke about his own music. Essentially a private man, he preferred to concentrate on the work of composing, conducting, and performing. Early in his career he was ridiculed by his critics for being too clever. Later on, he was often taken for granted and ignored by the English musical establishment, as his works became internationally recognized and honours were heaped upon him.

In one of his rare statements of his attitude towards composition, he revealed his indebtedness to two masters of twentieth-century art who were both highly versatile in their creative works:

> I try to write as Stravinsky has written and Picasso has painted. They passed from manner to manner as a bee passes from flower to flower. I try to do the same. Why should I lock myself inside a narrow idiom?[3]

This comment indicated Britten's imaginative approach to new problems of musical expression. The following study investigates this eclectic attitude from the vantage point of Britten's masterful writing for the percussion ensemble.

---

[3] "Benjamin Britten, the truly towering talent of his age," Obituary, Daily Telegraph (London), 6 December 1976.

CHAPTER I

A SURVEY OF PERCUSSION IN BRITTEN'S NON-STAGED WORKS

In Britten's non-theatrical works there are a number of notable instances of imaginative and effective use of percussion instruments. These twenty-six works written over a span of forty years can be divided into three chronological periods: 1936-1944, 1945-1960, and 1961-1976. The first period contains works written before Britten's first major opera, Peter Grimes (1945), and can therefore be called pre-operatic. The second period includes works written during Britten's most prolific period as an opera composer--a time which saw the creation of the full-scale and chamber operas, the three-act ballet, The Prince of the Pagodas (1956), and Britten's first venture into church-drama, Noye's Fludde (1957). This period will be referred to as the operatic period. The final period comprises the works from the War Requiem (1961) to the Welcome Ode (1976). During these fifteen years the three church parables, the television opera Owen Wingrave (1970), and Britten's last opera, Death in Venice (1973) were written.

The first work, written in 1935-36, was the film score to Night Mail--"one of the most successful documentaries ever made."[1] This film was produced by the General Post Office Film Unit in 1936 with verses by W.H. Auden (1907-1973). Britten's employment with the Film Unit shaped his musical style and working habits for the rest of his life.

---

[1] Basil Wright, "Britten and Documentary," The Musical Times, Vol. 104 (Nov., 1963): 770-780. His music for another documentary produced the same year, Coal Face, also with words by Auden, was scored for piano, percussion, and a speaking chorus.

Because of economic difficulties and a small budget, Britten had to compose at great speed, often in unfavourable circumstances, and to write for the handful of different instruments or players that happened to be available at a given time. In Night Mail he included the unusual combination of sandpaper and wind machine. The following photograph from the MS. score (see Plate 1) shows how the side-drum and the voice of the commentator are used to imitate the rhythm of the express train wheels, while the wind-machine gives the impression of the train's speedy travel through the night.[2]

In the same film, Britten anticipated musique-concrète by about twelve years: in order to provide the crescendo required for the train coming out of a tunnel, he recorded a single clash of the cymbal and then reversed the sound track. The weakening vibrations thereby became louder and louder, stopping just short of the initial stroke.[3]

This early contact with film music provided Britten with experience in writing for unusual combinations of instruments and in transforming visual and literary ideas into music. It encouraged him to create clear orchestral textures and forced him to produce music for a specific occasion to a deadline. He continued to welcome commissions of varying kinds throughout his career. This coincided with his belief that the composer should work as a craftsman within the community, and

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[2] Donald Mitchell, with the assistance of John Evans, Pictures from a Life: Benjamin Britten 1913-1976, A Pictorial Biography, (London and Boston: Faber and Faber), plate 94. The score was not available for this study.

[3] Imogen Holst, Britten, The Great Composers Series (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), p. 29.

Plate 1. Percussive effects in the film Night Mail.

never live removed in "splendid isolation" from real life.

Britten's first important commission--for the Norwich Festival in 1936--resulted in a symphonic cycle for soprano and orchestra, Our Hunting Fathers Op. 8. As Peter Evans points out, this work holds a key position in Britten's early development.[4] It was his first published score for full orchestra, his first song-cycle, and the first time he collaborated with Auden in a purely musical work outside the media of theatre, films, and radio. Written at the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, Auden's text reflects his strongly pacifist and humanitarian ideals, sentiments shared by Britten. It is not surprising, however, that these feelings were not greeted sympathetically by the audience of the "hunting, shooting, and fishing" class, people with a traditionally militaristic background. Perhaps due to its lukewarm reception, this important work has unfortunately still not been recorded.

In addition to chromatic timpani, Britten required two percussion players to play six unpitched instruments and one pitched instrument, the xylophone. At this early stage he already showed his awareness of percussive sonorities by frequent instructions in the score concerning choice of sticks and articulation. After the first few pages, where the side-drum is played with and without snares, with timpani sticks, and then with side-drum sticks, Britten found it necessary to insert a footnote: "When it is not specified to the con-

---

[4] Peter Evans, The Music of Benjamin Britten (London: Dent, 1979), p. 68.

trary the percussion is to be played in the normal manner."[5] At other points in the score, timpani sticks are used on the bass-drum, tenor drum, and cymbal, while sponge sticks are required for the bass drum and cymbal. Wooden sticks on the timpani accentuate the galloping rhythm of the hunt. In a slower section, marked "With parody! grotesque," the triangle is followed by a tremolo on the tambourine with both hands (score, p. 58).

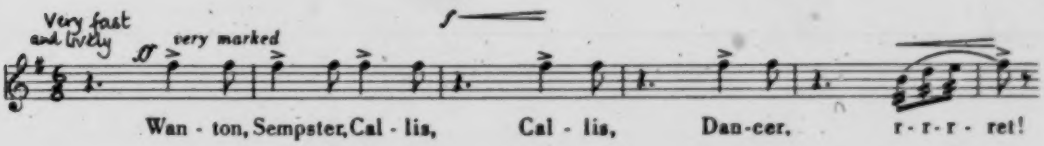
Towards the climax of the hunting song, entitled Dance of Death, Britten uses his unpitched percussion in an interesting manner which approximates tuned instruments. In conjunction with rising and falling glissandi on the timpani, the first percussion player beats triplets alternately on the tenor-drum and the side-drum, the second player alternating on the bass-drum and the cymbal. Both players use timpani sticks. The lower-sounding instruments (the tenor-drum and bass drum) coincide with the bottom notes of the timpani glissandi, while the higher ones (side-drum and cymbal) match the top of each glissando. This furious evocation of the hunters' excitement, with fortissimo strings and tutti orchestra, builds up a long crescendo for eighteen bars, before the mood relaxes and the hunt dies away.

It is also in the Dance of Death that Britten uses the solo voice for percussive effect, long before the sound poetry of Bob Cobbing

---

[5] Benjamin Britten, Our Hunting Fathers: Symphonic Cycle for High Voice and Orchestra, Op. 8, devised by W.H. Auden. (London: Boosey and Hawkes, 1964), p. 7.

and his followers came into general acceptance in the 1960's.[6] The soprano is asked for flutter-tonguing and glissandi for the expletive, "Whuret!" The names of the hunting hounds, used as a refrain between the two verses, are also declaimed in a percussive rhythmical manner, shown below in Example 1 (score, p. 45).



Ex. 1. Dance of Death, fourth Song from Our Hunting Fathers.

The xylophone is used sparsely until the last movement, the Epilogue and Funeral March. Here it is given a repetitive phrase in triplets which recurs with increasing frequency to become the dominating factor at the end of the work. The rhythm is derived from the Dance of Death, and the instrument's function is primarily colouristic and rhythmic. Its melodic qualities are not yet exploited.

Between Our Hunting Fathers and the last major work of this period, the Sinfonia da Requiem (1940), Britten wrote six works which include percussion instruments. In the first and last movements of Soirées Musicales (1936), Britten began to use the xylophone for melodic purposes. He also used the castanets in Bolero, the fourth move-

---

[6] It is possible that Britten knew about the experiments in this field by the Futurists (see Introduction), but it is more probable that he was influenced by Walton's Façade (1922). In March, 1936, he had given a B.B.C. broadcast, accompanying Sophie Wyss in one of the songs from that work (see Donald Mitchell, Pictures, plate 78). He started work on Our Hunting Fathers in May of the same year. The alto saxophone is featured in both Britten's and Walton's works.

ment. This work is an arrangement of five movements by Rossini; it was combined with Matinées Musicales, a second suite of movements by Rossini, to form the score for a ballet produced in 1941 by the American Ballet Company with choreography by Georges Balanchine. Matinées Musicales makes extensive use of the celesta in the second movement, Nocturne, and of the tambourine in the Waltz.

The Piano Concerto No. 1 (1938), although optimistically numbered, remains the only example of this genre in Britten's works. This is surprising in view of Britten's own expertise and excellent reputation as a pianist. The work is in four movements entitled Toccata, Waltz, Impromptu, and March.[7] The pianistic idiom owes a lot to Prokofiev and Bartók, and the composer's program-note for the first performance gives a lucid description of the style of the work:

> It was conceived with the idea of exploiting various important characteristics of the pianoforte, such as its enormous compass, its percussive quality [this author's emphasis] and its suitability for figuration; so that it is not by any means a Symphony with pianoforte, but rather a bravura Concerto with orchestral accompaniment.[8]

As Britten indicated, the orchestra complements rather than conflicts with the soloist. It is therefore understandable that the brillant percussive writing for the piano is not apparent in the other

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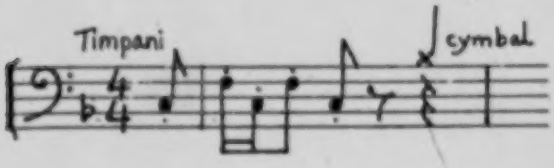
[7] In 1945, after his return to England from the United States, Britten replaced the original third movement (Recitative and Aria) with the entirely new Impromptu.

[8] Mitchell, Pictures, plate 111. Britten's reference to a Symphony with pianoforte was a possible jibe at Brahms, whose Piano Concerto in B-flat also has four movements. Britten had a lifelong dislike for Brahms' music, which he tried to overcome--without success.

percussion instruments, which play a relatively minor role in this concerto.

The next two works have an interesting feature in common. Written in the same year, the Violin Concerto (1939) and Canadian Carnival (Kermesse Canadienne) both begin with introductory solos by the percussion. The timpani (with cymbal) opens the concerto with a staccato motive which provides rhythmic and melodic unity throughout the movement:[9]



The strings later extend the rhythm of the original motive (score, p. 10), leading into D minor for the recapitulation. Here the timpani's first statement is lengthened to twelve bars (score, p. 11) from the original three, before pizzicato strings accompany the soloist's closing statement.

Canadian Carnival repeats its first section at the end of the work, using a framing device that is one of Britten's favourite structural techniques.[10] The opening percussion in this case consists of two suspended cymbals, one small and one large. Combined with a triadic

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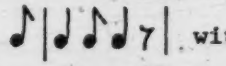
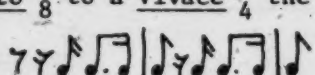
[9] Benjamin Britten, Concerto for Violin and Orchestra, Op. 25, Revised version 1958, reduction for Violin and Piano (London: Hawkes and Son, 1940 and 1958), pp. 1-2.

[10] This device was previously used in Ballad of Heroes (1939), and can be seen in numerous later works, including such well-known examples as A Ceremony of Carols (1942), Serenade for Tenor, Horn and Strings (1943), The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra (1946), and the church parables (1964, 1966, 1968). The way in which the frame is used to enhance the dramatic impact of Children's Crusade (1968) will be discussed in the final section of this chapter (see below page 47).

theme played by the trumpets "behind the stage, very distant" and the gradual addition of the rest of the orchestra, these two cymbals have long tremoli, with a crescendo from pianississimo to forte extending for fifty-four bars.[11] They are played with soft sticks, sometimes together and then alternately. The build-up of the tutti is reversed at the end of the work (score, pp. 44-48), the instruments dropping out gradually and leaving the two cymbals again alone with the backstage trumpets.[12]

The xylophone has only a small part (score, pp. 35-43), but there are a few other percussive effects in this work which need mention. Chromatic timpani are required for glissandi. They are used in a more exposed manner than had been the case in Our Hunting Fathers, and together with bass drum and side drum, they act as the connecting link to the penultimate section of the work. After a climax of wind, brass, harp, and strings, the timpani makes the transition with a rising glissando. At the same time the bass drum marks the rhythm  with side-drum sticks. As the metre changes from the Allegretto $\frac{6}{8}$ to a Vivace $\frac{2}{4}$ the side drum speeds up the same rhythm with a brush:  This is an unusual example of one of the traditional functions of percussion--to provide transition between contrasting sections or movements. The choice of hard sticks here has

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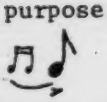
[11] Benjamin Britten, Canadian Carnival: Kermesse Canadienne, Op. 19. (London: Hawkes and Son, 1948), pp. 1-7.

[12] Twenty years later, Britten was to use the cymbal in a similar way, in Cantata Academica (1959). In the fugue of that work, the cymbal has a long crescendo for twenty-one bars, with cumulative reinforcement from other percussion instruments (see page 31). The framing device is also used in this work.

a specific dynamic purpose, as it does later on when the bass drum employs the drag () and the ruff ( ), which are usually reserved for the side drum (score, pp. 34-35). In both cases the normal soft-headed beater for the bass drum would not be able to articulate these grace notes, so Britten has carefully indicated the harder side-drum sticks to be used. It is again unfortunate that no recording of this seminal work is available.

The Sinfonia da Requiem, Op. 20 was written in the United States in 1940 to celebrate the 2600th anniversary of the founding of the Mikado dynasty in Japan. This sombre work is scored for alto flute, bass clarinet, double bassoon, alto saxophone, six horns, three trumpets and three trombones, tuba, two harps and piano, in addition to the regular woodwind and strings. In the percussion section Britten calls for four players in addition to the timpanist. Once again, the only pitched percussion is the xylophone, but the piano is also used percussively, often reinforcing the harps. The work is in three movements, Lacrymosa, Dies Irae, and Requiem Aeternam. In the Dies Irae Britten brings his full orchestral forces to bear on the explosive centrepiece of the work. In this movement, unlike those surrounding it, all the percussion instruments are used, in a scherzo of demonic force which ends in disintegration. Donald Mitchell calls it a "positive tour de force of orchestral imagination, the summit of the work's pace and tension."[13] The driving rhythms, dramatic climaxes, and imaginative

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[13] Donald Mitchell, sleeve notes to Sinfonia da Requiem. Danish State Radio Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Benjamin Britten (London LL1123).

orchestration remind one of the wilder parts of Stravinsky's Le Sacre du printemps, and, although on a smaller scale, the Dies Irae is no less impressive in its own context.

At the beginning of the movement, marked Allegro con fuoco, the thuds of timpani and bass drum from the first movement yield to the flutes announcing the main rhythmic motive with flutter-tonguing:

. This is later taken up by the entire orchestra at the great climax, before the work commences its unnerving collapse.[14] At this point five of the seven percussion instruments are used within one bar (timpani, bass drum, xylophone, side drum, and cymbal) and continue together for the following five bars. The remaining two (tambourine and whip) occur two and four bars later respectively. There follow five pages of disconnected chaos, with a different percussion instrument played in nearly every bar. The contrasting textures are shown in Examples 2 and 3 on pages 17 and 18.

A rising chromatic passage for the xylophone, harp, and flute (score, p. 55) leads to the slower, closing section, where soft rolls on side drum and bass drum emphasize the dying away of the lower instruments. This is one of the most exciting and dramatically effective movements in Britten's entire oeuvre.

Of the three remaining works of the pre-operatic period, Matinées Musicales has already been mentioned. The percussion writing in Scottish Ballad (1941) is not particularly remarkable. Diversions,

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[14] Benjamin Britten, Sinfonia da Requiem, Opus 20 (London: Boosey and Hawkes, 1942), p. 51.

Ex. 2. Dies Irae, page 51 of Sinfonia da Requiem.

Ex. 3. Dies Irae, page 52 of Sinfonia da Requiem.

Op. 21 (1940)[15] for piano (left hand only) and orchestra comprises eleven variations on a theme. It was written at the request of Paul Wittgenstein. In this work the timpani makes a forceful contribution to the theme in its first statement, and in the final Tarantella repeats the theme as an ostinato before the closing tutti. There are short solos by several percussion instruments in the Tarantella which serve to accentuate the whirling rhythm in $\frac{9}{8}$ time, marked presto con fuoco.[16]

At the end of World War II, Britten completed his first full-scale opera, Peter Grimes.[17] He had also begun work on his first chamber opera, The Rape of Lucretia, when he was requested to write another film score. This commission resulted in The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra which was completed on New Year's Eve, 1945.

The works of the pre-operatic period demonstrate the colouristic use of percussion and its role in providing rhythmic and dynamic support to the orchestra. Occasionally, as in the Violin Concerto and Canadian Carnival, percussion had been used motivically, providing internal unity to and between sections. However, it was not until The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra that the percussion was made to function independently and the melodic possibilities of the pitched instruments were explored for the first time. The work in fact summa-

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[15] The work was revised twice, in 1951 and 1954.

[16] Benjamin Britten, Diversions for Piano (Left Hand) and Orchestra, Op. 21. Reduction for Two Pianos (London: Boosey and Hawkes, 1955), pp. 47-65.

[17] Paul Bunyan, Britten's first operetta, was written and performed in the U.S.A. in 1941. However, it only received its British premiere in 1976 and remained unpublished until 1978. See Mitchell, Pictures, chronological table, pp. 4 and 10.

rizes all the functions of percussion which Britten had explored in his earlier compositions, and shows his mastery of instrumental effects with both pitched and unpitched percussion in contrast with each other and with the rest of the orchestra.

This instructional work consists of thirteen variations and a fugue on a theme from Purcell's Abdelazar (1695). Britten requires "at least" three players and timpanist in the percussion section. The pitched instruments are timpani, xylophone and gong;[18] the unpitched instruments are bass drum, tambourine, side drum, cymbal, triangle, Chinese block, castanets, and whip. During the course of this work each instrumental family has three solo sections. There are six statements of the theme, first by full orchestra, then by woodwind, brass, strings and harp, percussion, and full orchestra again. There follow thirteen variations, one by each instrumental type, often in different metres, accompanied by different percussion and other instruments in turn. The final variation is for the whole percussion section. In the ensuing fugue, the theme is taken up by each instrumental group in the same order that it occurred in the variations, the percussion entering last. The finale combines Britten's fugue simultaneously with the Purcell theme, augmented by the brass, before the majestic tutti

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[18] The gong is frequently confused with the tamtam, which is indeterminate in pitch, owing to the multiple overtones present. See James Blades, Percussion Instruments and their History, new & rev. ed. (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), p. 383n.

ending. The structure of the work, including independent sections for percussion, is presented in Table 2 on page 22.

Britten applied the percussion ensemble to Purcell's famous theme as indicated below in Example 4.[19]

Ex. 4. Opening bars of Purcell's theme in The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra.

The thirteenth variation (score Variation M, p. 44), scored for strings and percussion, introduces each percussion instrument gradually. The timpani starts with a melodic phrase which remains the dominant motive of this section. After the entry of the Chinese block, the xylophone is given a phrase which demonstrates this instrument's characteristics for the first time in Britten's work. The fast chromatics, chords, and glissando are shown in Example 5 on page 23 (score, p. 46).

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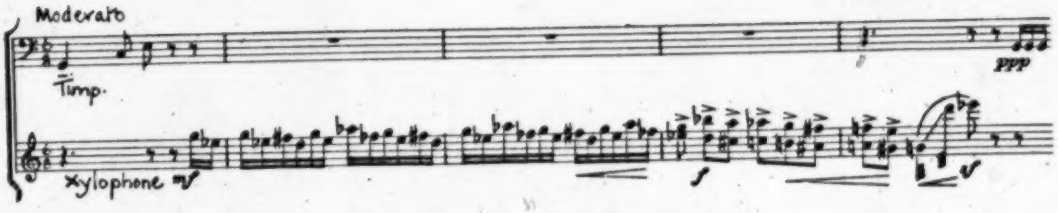
[19] Benjamin Britten, The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra: Variations and Fugue on a Theme of Purcell, Op. 34 (London: Hawkes and Son, 1947), p. 5.

TABLE 2

STRUCTURE OF INSTRUMENTAL ENTRIES IN
THE YOUNG PERSON'S GUIDE TO THE ORCHESTRA

	THEME: 1	2	3	4	5	6
Metre	3/2	3/2	3/2	3/2	3/2	3/2
Main Instrument	Full Orch.	Woodwind	Brass	Strings+Hp.	Percussion	Full Orch.
Perc.Instr.	Bass drum, Timp., Side drum, Xylophone, Cymbal	-	-	-	Bass drum, Timp.,Cymbal, Side drum,Tamb. Triangle	Bass drum, Timp., Side drum, Xylophone, Cymbal
Score Page	5-7	8-9	10-11	12-13	14	15-16
	VARIATIONS: 1	2	3	4	5	6
Metre	2/4	4/4	6/8	4/4	3/4	3/4
Main Instrument	Flutes+ Piccolo	Oboes	Clarinets	Bassoons	Violins	Violas
Perc.Instr.	Triangle	Timp.	-	Side drum (no snares)	Bass drum	——Timp.
Score Page	18-20	20-21	21-23	24-25	26-28	28-29
	7	8	9	10	11	12
Metre	3/4	2/4	4/2	3/2	2/4	4/4
Main Instr.	Celli	D.Bass	Harp	Horns	Trumpets	Tromb+Tuba
Perc.Inst.	-	Tamb.	Gong+ Cymb.	Timp.(Side Dr. Sticks)	Side drum	-
	13					PURCELL TH. AND FUGUE:
Main Instr.	6/8 Percussion: Timp.,Bass drum, Cymb., Tamb., Triangle, S.drum, Chin.Block,Xylophone, Castanets, Gong, Whip		Entries in same order as in the Variations:	FUGUE: 2 Flutes/Picc.,Oboes, 4 Clarinets,Bassoons, Violins,Violas,'Celli D-Bass,Harp,Horns, Trumpets,Tromb.+Tuba, Percussion.(61-63)		3/4 6/8 Full Orch., Cumulative Percussion
Score Page	44-49			50-63		63-69 End.



Ex. 5. Xylophone part in Variation M.

The last entry of the fugue theme, for percussion, is scored for timpani, xylophone, cymbal, bass drum, tambourine, side drum, and gong. Other examples of imaginative use of percussion instruments include the timbres of the gong and cymbal which effectively colour the harp solo in the ninth variation (score pp. 34-35), and the rhythmic ostinato of the side drum which supports the trumpets in Variation K (score, pp. 38-39).

In 1948 Britten wrote the cantata Saint Nicolas which, with Noye's Fludde (1957), was to become a prototype for the church parables (see Chap. IV). The cantata was written to celebrate the centenary of Lancing College, a well-known boys' school in Sussex. Like Children's Crusade twenty years later, it involves both amateur and professional performers. In an introductory note in the score, Britten explains how it can be played and sung by school children, but with a professional string quintet, solo tenor, timpanist, and a separate conductor for the gallery choir. He gives specific instructions for the two percussion parts:

> The first percussion part is obligato and should be played by a professional drummer, who may play as many of the instruments included in the second part

> as is feasible; the second part is ad libitum and may be played by as many gifted and/or enthusiastic amateurs as there are instruments.[20]

The percussion instruments are timpani, side drum, bass drum, tenor drum, cymbal, triangle, gong, whip, and tambourine. The timpani is given a prominent supportive and descriptive role in this work. In the introductory prayer, it is the only percussion instrument used for the first seven pages, the part consisting of regular half-note beats on a pedal E until the entry of Saint Nicolas, when it changes to a fortissimo roll on G_1 with a clashed cymbal (score, pp. 1-8). In the fourth movement, He Journeys to Palestine, the saint encounters a storm at sea. Soft tremoli on timpani, side drum, and tambourine provide an ominous atmosphere while Nicolas warns the ship's crew of the impending storm. When "Lightning split the waves that poured in wild cascades on board," the timpani's tremolo rises by semitone, with a crescendo. Should the modern chromatic timpani not be available, Britten suggests that the tremolo can be played on F_1-natural only (score, p. 38, footnote). After the thick scoring of the storm scene the timpani creates an effective hiatus in the dramatic flow--providing a mood of tension and suspense that continues throughout Nicolas' recitative (score, p. 51):

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[20] Benjamin Britten, Saint Nicolas, Op. 42, A Cantata for Tenor Solo, Mixed Chorus, Piano Duet, Strings, Percussion and Organ. Words by Eric Crozier (London: Boosey and Hawkes, 1949) introductory note.

Ex. 6. Saint Nicolas' prayer.

Although the timpani is used extensively in this work, other percussion instruments are not neglected, and there are important parts for triangle, tambourine, cymbal, whip, and side drum, each played separately. The timpani part in Saint Nicolas does indicate, however, that after its effective use in Britten's first three operas, the timpani continued to be the main percussion instrument employed for dramatic purposes.[21]

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[21] Two particular cases in point are the Nocturne Op. 60 (1958), and Cantata Misericordium Op. 69 (1963), where the timpani is used, in the first work as a solo obbligato instrument, and in the second work as the only percussion instrument.

The percussion section required for the Spring Symphony, Op. 44 (1949) is the largest in Britten's works to this date. Britten had now reached maturity in his percussion writing. He used a greater number of instruments, including--for the first time--the vibraphone, and he elevated them to a level of considerable importance. They are used both independently and together, and for motivic, rhythmic, and dynamic support. But in only two of the twelve movements is the full complement of instruments required; six movements employ no percussion whatsoever, and four movements use between one and three percussion instruments each.

As in the Violin Concerto and Canadian Carnival, Britten chose percussion instruments to introduce the work. Seven percussion instruments are used in the opening four-bar phrase.[22] This phrase, with the timpani doubling the first harp's motive, provides the ritornello that gives the first movement definition and unity. In each bar there is a cumulative addition of two instruments until the last bar, which rings with a solo sustained chord from the vibraphone. There is here a gradation from the unpitched instruments at the beginning towards the pitched instruments which conclude the phrase:

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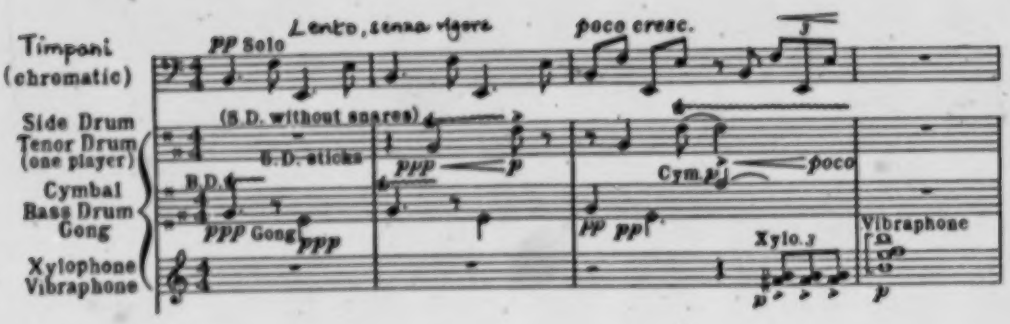
[22] Benjamin Britten, Spring Symphony, Op. 44 for Soprano, Alto and Tenor Soli, Mixed Chorus, Boys' Choir and Orchestra (London: Hawkes and Son, 1950), p. 1.



Ex. 7. Percussion ritornello, Spring Symphony.

This example reflects Britten's new awareness of the melodic possibilities of the percussion section, five of the twelve instruments being pitched.

The unpitched percussion instruments are used to begin the massive finale. The cow horn adds rustic colour to this exuberant May-day festival, and there are short solo sections for the xylophone, timpani, whip, triangle, and side drum. The colouristic possibilities of the percussion section are emphasized by contrasting and combining the pitched with the unpitched instruments.

Britten shows in this work that he can manipulate the timbral resources of percussion in several different ways. Timbre can be used "as a single basic colour over long periods" and "as a succession of contrasting colours, or the two usages can be combined."[23] The function of monocolouring is shown in three songs: Spring, the Sweet Spring, The Driving Boy, and The Morning Star, use the timpani, the tambourine, and the bells respectively. The "succession of contrasting colours"

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[23]Reginald Smith Brindle, Contemporary Percussion (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 184.

is shown in the opening of the work, and the last "combined" function is apparent in the finale.

Britten did not write another choral and orchestral work for the next ten years. The intervening period saw the production of four operas, the full-length ballet, The Prince of the Pagodas, the setting of the Chester Miracle Play, Noye's Fludde (1957), the second and third canticles, two song cycles, and other vocal and instrumental works, including Nocturne, Op. 60 (1958). Nocturne is the first non-staged work to include percussion since the Spring Symphony, with one of the seven remarkable obbligato parts being written for timpani.

This part occurs in the excerpt from Wordsworth's Prelude, which tells of the sleepless poet's fears in the middle of the night, at the time of the French Revolution. The ominous rumblings of the timpani, suggesting both the poet's dread and the tumbrils of the guillotine, make this the most dramatic song of the cycle. Its forceful impact is due to the distinctive tone colour of the timpani in juxtaposition with the horn and cor anglais obbligati of the surrounding songs and to the manner in which the drums are used.[24] The sinister mood of the text is enhanced by employing a steady march tempo with increasing dynamics and irregular metrical groupings of notes. The latter are illustrated in the opening pages, where the fastest notes are triplets (score, p. 33). There is a five-note group at the word "Massacres," followed by groupings of six

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[24] Benjamin Britten, Nocturne for Tenor Solo, Seven Obligato Instruments, and String Orchestra, Op. 60 (London: Boosey and Hawkes, 1959), pp. 33-43.

notes during a crescendo. This exciting virtuoso part is shown below in Example 8.[25]

Ex. 8. Timpani obbligato in Nocturne, Op. 60.

During the long crescendo from pianississimo to forte, the tension builds until the voice and timpani break into a new section, "the horse is taught his manage" (score, p. 39). At this point there are frequent changes of metre preparing the singer's declamation "The earthquake is not satisfied at once" (score, p. 41). In the last section the tension is further increased by the timpani struck with wooden sticks combined with tremolo strings, reaching a final climax with the cry "Sleep no more!"

Ten years after the Spring Symphony Britten wrote another work for chorus and orchestra, Cantata Academica Carmen Basiliense (1959), commemorating the 500th anniversary of the University of Basle.

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[25] As a percussionist, James Blades cites this part as exploiting the full range of possibilities of the modern machine drum. The chromatic ascending and descending passages were carefully planned by the composer. Each drum recommences on the note on which it has previously halted, allowing the player full concentration on one drum at a time. See Blades, Percussion Instruments, p. 423.

Although the work is on a smaller scale than the Spring Symphony, the percussion section is used more extensively and the pitched instruments play a larger role. As in Britten's chamber opera The Turn of the Screw of five years earlier, the work is constructed on a twelve-note theme but employs a basically diatonic idiom.[26] The Cantata is in two parts, the first containing seven sections, the second containing six. The two outer movements form the familiar Britten frame. The percussion instruments are heard more frequently in these movements, as they had also been in the outer movements of the Spring Symphony.

As in the earlier work, the batteria contains twelve instruments. However, the tenor drum, gong, vibraphone, and castanets have now been replaced by triangle, tamtam, glockenspiel, and celesta. It is significant that these are all metal instruments, two of them with melodic function in the upper range. This choice may have derived from Britten's exposure to Balinese gamelan music during his Far East tour of 1956,[27] although the bells and celesta had already been used with brilliant effect in The Turn of the Screw.

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[26] For a discussion of the use of the theme, see Evans, The Music of Benjamin Britten, pp. 433-436.

[27] For a description of the Far East tour, see Prince Ludwig of Hesse, "Ausflug Ost," in Tribute to Benjamin Britten on his Fiftieth Birthday, ed. Anthony Gishford (London: Faber, 1963), p. 56.

In the first and last movements the glockenspiel and bells give festive colour to the Corale. The glockenspiel's three-bar phrase becomes a recurrent theme at the end of both movements, accompanied by rising glissandi from the bells (Example 9 below).[28] In the final movement the bells are also given their own melodic solo, which is a variant of the glockenspiel theme (score, pp. 88 - 93).

Ex. 9. Recurring theme for Glockenspiel and Tubular Bells, first movement of Cantata Academica.

The glockenspiel is featured again, with celesta, in the soprano solo Arioso con canto populare, the tenth movement. Here the two bell-like instruments have a monocolouring function, holding a high pedal on d^1 and d^2 throughout, with the celesta sometimes doubling the harp. The xylophone provides melodic reinforcement in the Scherzo, doubling the flute, piccolo, and first violin parts (score, pp. 38-41 and 48-49).

The unpitched instruments are used in similar ways, seldom played together but often heard consecutively in short solos. The long crescendo by the cymbal in the exposition of the fugue in Tema

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[28] Benjamin Britten, Cantata Academica Carmen Basiliense, Op. 62, Hawkes Pocket Scores (London: Boosey and Hawkes, 1960), pp. 9-11, 94-96.

Seriale con Fuga, has already been singled out (see page 14n.). The side drum has an elaborate part in the Canone ed Ostinato. For almost the entire movement, it is played molto marcato sempre solo in a long succession of syncopated phrases requiring great concentration and dexterity (score, pp. 74-87).

Except for a short intervallic theme in the Scherzo, the timpani's main function is to provide pedal points in four movements of this work. In the framing movements, it holds a pedal on G_1, which is the first note of the serial theme. In the second ("mirror") movement, it has a chord of F_1 and A_1 which forms a rhythmical ostinato with the wind, brass, and double bass. In the ninth movement, Soli e duetto, the C pedal is used as a punctuating accompaniment to the solo bass voice. Since these pedal points represent in all cases the note of the serial theme on which each respective movement is based, it can be said that the timpani is used thematically in this work. In general, however, the percussion writing is not independent in the Cantata, but lends colouristic, melodic, and rhythmic support to the rest of the orchestral texture.

After Cantata Academica, probably in 1961, Britten wrote a short work for James Blades.[29] Timpani Piece for Jimmy is scored for pedal-tuned timpani and piano and takes one-and-a-half minutes to

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[29] See Blade's reference to this work in his Drum Roll: A Professional Adventure from the Circus to the Concert Hall (London: Faber and Faber, 1977), p. 229.

perform.[30] It is worth mentioning as another indication of Britten's affection for this instrument, and, incidentally, for the indefatigable percussionist who has helped to bring so many of Britten's percussion scores to life since meeting the composer in 1936.

In the final period, from the War Requiem (1961) onwards, the emphasis on percussion increases in Britten's works. There is greater metrical and textural independence from the rest of the orchestra, and unusual techniques and combinations within the percussion ensemble. This new development in style, which can be observed in most of the works of this period, was the result of the influence on Britten of the 1955-56 tour to the Far East. During this trip, he was greatly impressed by the Japanese Noh theatre and by the music of the Balinese gamelan orchestra. The exotic gamelan-like scoring in The Prince of the Pagodas represents the first and most immediate result of the visit. Further influence is apparent in the choice of some of the instruments and techniques in the War Requiem and is most obvious in the wholly new idiom of Curlew River (1964).

The War Requiem brought unexpected acclaim for Britten from around the world. This massive work is scored for soprano, tenor, and baritone soloists, mixed chorus, boys' choir, full orchestra, chamber orchestra, and organ. Each orchestra has a percussion section, for

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[30] It is included, on side 2, on an excellent educational record, introduced and explained by Blades: Blades on Percussion. The Voice of the Instrument. All About Music Series (Discourses ABK 13, 1973). There is a sixteen-page booklet enclosed on the history of percussion, and descriptions of the instruments illustrated by Blades. The score of the Britten work is unpublished.

which six players are required, four for the larger number of instruments in the full orchestra, two for those in the chamber orchestra.[31] The full orchestra requires timpani and fourteen additional percussion instruments: two side drums, tenor drum, bass drum, tambourine, triangle, cymbals, castanets, whip, Chinese blocks, gong, bells (C^1 and F^1 -sharp), vibraphone, glockenspiel, and antique cymbals (C^1 and F^1 -sharp). It will be noted that half of this number consists of metallophones. The percussion instruments in the chamber orchestra are timpani, side drum, bass drum, cymbal, and gong. The vibraphone is used for the first time since the Spring Symphony, and the antique cymbals, or finger cymbals, make their first appearance in Britten's non-theatrical works. Often referred to as crotales, these instruments are usually played in pairs, one held in either hand. If they are suspended from the index finger and thumb of one hand, they can be played very fast, like castanets.[32] If a full set of crotales is to be used, they are mounted on a stand in keyboard order and are struck with beaters. Since Britten specifies that these cymbals be tuned to C^1 and F^1 -sharp, and he scores for an unusual tremolo from them in the Sanctus, it is clear that he requires finger cymbals, noting "if Antique Cymbals are not

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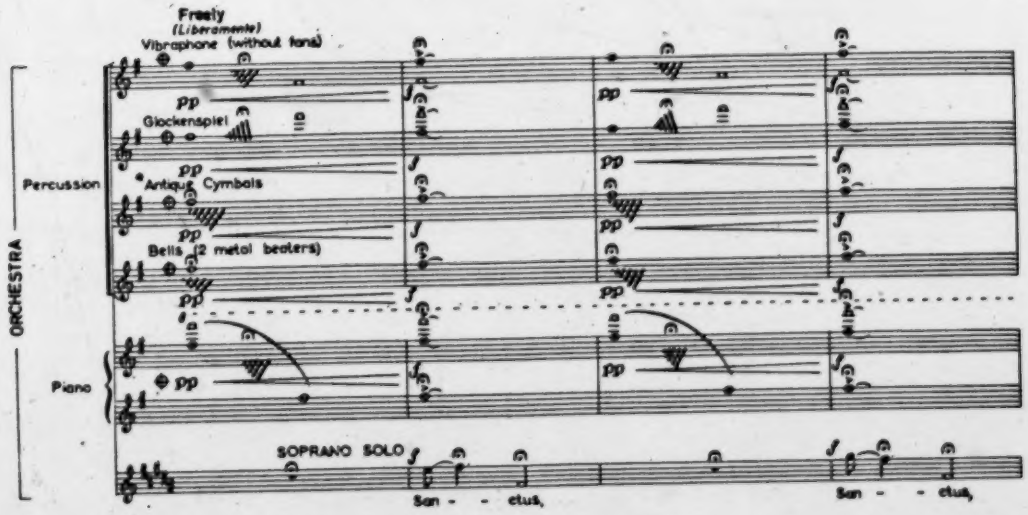
[31] The only previous works which required as many percussion players were Billy Budd (1951) and The Prince of the Pagodas. The only subsequent work which requires more than these is the Children's Crusade (see below, page 43).

[32] Smith Brindle, Contemporary Percussion, p. 71.

available--use untuned pair of small cymbals (clashed) instead."[33]

The vibraphone occurs only once in the War Requiem, as a metallophone (played "without fans") combined with the glockenspiel, antique cymbals, and bells, all of which introduce the Sanctus. Two metal beaters are required to play the tubular bells, giving them a much harder, more metallic sound than that produced by the usual rawhide hammers. These four pitched instruments give an excellent example of monocolouring function, providing an accompaniment of "metal" tremoli (as opposed to membrane or wood) for the soprano part:



Ex.10. Sanctus from the War Requiem.

The tremoli shown here are exceptional in that they imitate the slowly accelerating, unmeasured tremoli of the Japanese drummers of the Noh theatre, shown by the sign in the score. A few bars later the

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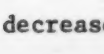
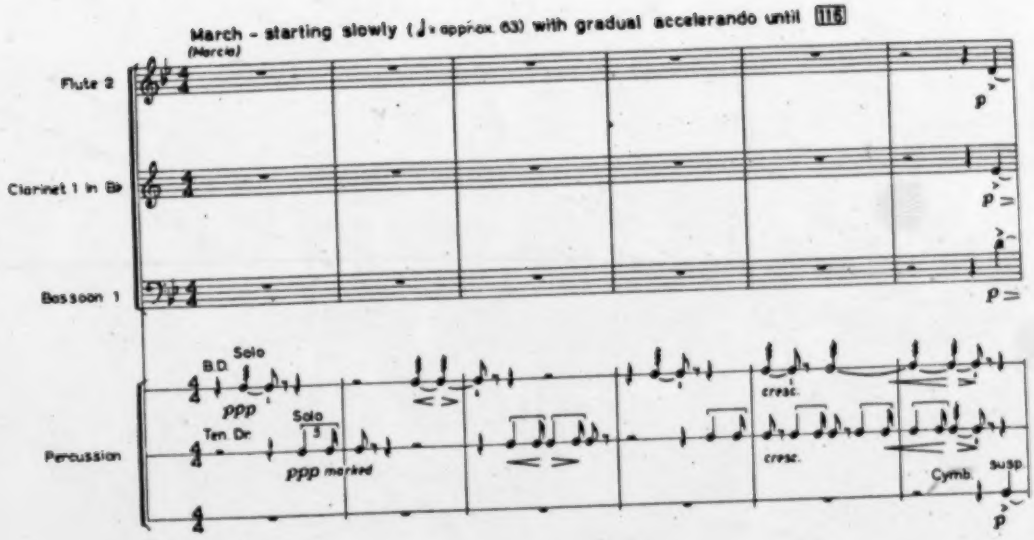
[33] Benjamin Britten, War Requiem, Op. 66 (London: Boosey and Hawkes, 1962), p. 140.

same instruments imitate the reverse effect, where the tremoli decrease in pace, indicated thus  . The metrical freedom of this section is further shown by the dotted barlines and the lack of a metre signature.

Britten uses percussion for monocolouring in other sections of this work. The gongs and bells reiterate the unifying tritone in the opening Requiem Aeternam, while the Libera Me is based on a constant membranic background of the side, tenor, and bass drum.

Britten's tendency to use his percussion instruments consecutively rather than together is very apparent in the War Requiem. In this work he uses the varied timbres and characteristics of wood, membrane, and metal instruments to contrast with and complement each other in ways not explored in previous non-staged works. In effect, the associative symbolism of the instruments begins to be significant. This is particularly noticeable in the use of the different types of drums. The dull thudding quality of the tenor drum is often associated with fate and death. Britten makes use of these associations in the Libera Me section of the Requiem. The tenor and bass drums begin the movement with a sombre, inexorable march rhythm which dominates the whole movement, shown in Example 11 on page 37 (score, p. 178).

In the Dies Irae movement there are several occasions where, instead of the timpani, the unpitched bass drum is preferred to underline the dark phrases of the chorus and orchestra (for instance, see score, pp. 72-73). This instrument is used frequently throughout the work for a variety of purposes. It provides dynamic support, different



Ex.11. Libera Me from the War Requiem.

rhythmic figurations, and colouristic effects. Most orchestrators recommend restrained use of the bass drum, "yet nobody has complained that the drum has been over-used in this work."[34]

The timpani is used--as in the Nocturne--for extensive and highly effective dramatic expression. It often takes on a quasi-obbligato function in accompanying the baritone soloist. In Owen's wrathful description of the huge gun, the timpani's arpeggios, played fortissimo with hard sticks, present a sound image of the gun being

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[34] Smith Brindle, Contemporary Percussion, p. 131.

raised to fire, as the baritone sings "Be slowly lifted up, thou long black arm " in Example 12 below (score, p. 67).

Ex. 12. Representation of the Gun in the War Requiem.

In the closing solo for baritone, Owen prophesies that future generations will revolt against the world they inherit after the destruction of war. At the words, "They will be swift, with swiftness of the tigress," a rhythmic ostinato is begun by the solo timpani played with side-drum sticks. The dreamlike urgency of the text is enhanced by the discrepancy in tempo between this ostinato and the voice. The timpani part is marked "deliberate--no connection with main tempo."[35] This

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[35] Britten, War Requiem, p. 224.

section of disjunct rhythm and tempo between voice and drum is followed by frequent metre changes, both early indications of the non-alignment principle which became so prominent in Britten's later works.

The metrical irregularities, choice of instruments, and the unusual tremolo technique make the War Requiem the first of Britten's non-stage works to reveal the influences of his oriental experience.

In his next major work with percussion, Britten returns to a classical form and title. This is the Symphony for Cello and Orchestra, Op. 68 (1963). It is one of five works written for the great Russian cellist Mstislav Rostropovich, and it is the longest purely instrumental score that Britten produced.

The percussion scoring in this work shows an equal division between membrane and metal instruments, with the whip as the only instrument made of wood. The instruments specified are bass drum, tenor drum, side drum, tambourine, gong, tamtam, cymbals, vibraphone, and whip. For the first time the composer distinguished between the gong and the tamtam, requiring both. The percussion instruments are used in several remarkable passages of considerable ingenuity. In the first movement, the bass drum and gong support the contrabassoon, tuba, and double bass.[36] In the vivo section of this movement, crescendi by the solo timpani (with side drum and cymbal) accompany the high strings and

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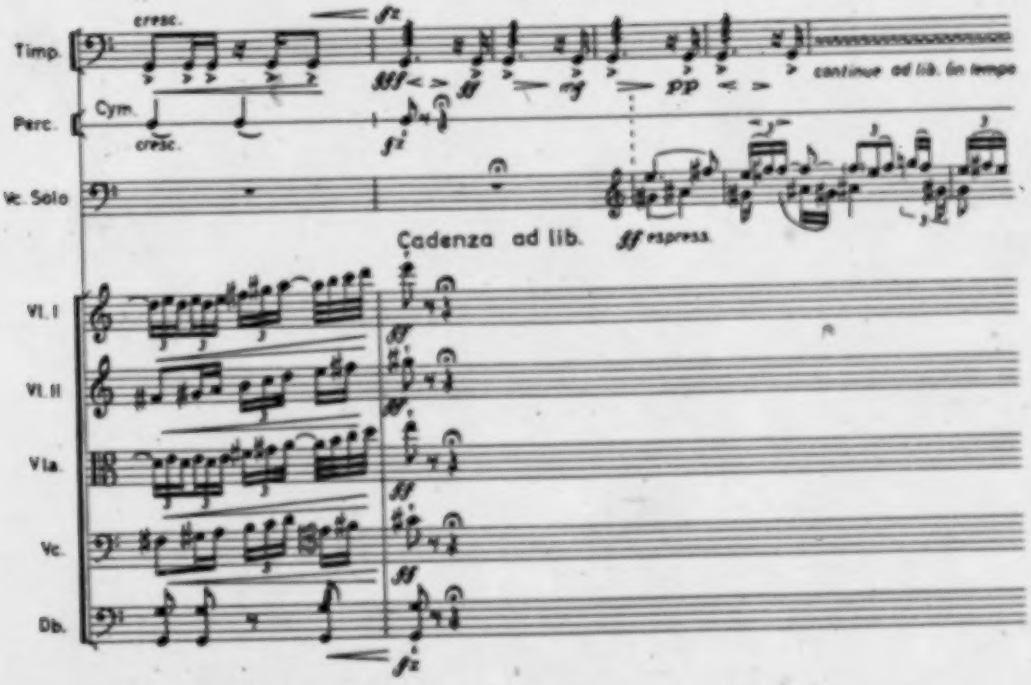
[36] Benjamin Britten, Symphony for Cello and Orchestra, Op. 68 (London: Boosey and Hawkes, 1964), pp. 1-42.

winds. In the third movement, a timpani obbligato is combined with the solo cello part and extends into the cadenza, shown in Example 13 below (score, p. 86).



Ex. 13. Cadenza linking third and fourth movements, Cello Symphony.

Percussion is also used for contrasting tone-colour. In the second movement, the tambourine provides a suitable foil to the rapid scale passages in the solo cello part. Flute and vibraphone (played with fans) are used in similar contrasting roles in the final Passacaglia.

Once again and for the last time, the timpani is used as the sole percussion instrument in Cantata Misericordium, Op. 69 (1963).

Written for the centenary of the Red Cross in Geneva, the work is scored for tenor and baritone soli, chorus, and orchestra. The text is by Patrick Wilkinson and recounts the parable of the Good Samaritan. As in the War Requiem, Nocturne, and Saint Nicolas, the presence of a narrative seems to have stimulated Britten's expressive writing for the timpani.

Between Cantata Misericordium and Children's Crusade, Britten wrote the church parables, along with two shorter works: Hankin Booby (1966)--later incorporated into the Suite on English Folk Tunes, Op. 90 (1974)--and The Building of the House, Op. 79 (1967). In the latter, Britten's delight in metal percussion at this time is shown by his scoring for four of these instruments, with only the side drum, to make up the percussion section. The xylophone part requires three mallets to play three-note chords.

Children's Crusade, Op. 82 (1969) is the largest score that Britten wrote for percussion. It is the culmination of a lifelong interest in this section of the orchestra. With the possible exception of his last opera, Death in Venice, this work exploits the dramatic potential of percussion more than any of his other works.

Donald Mitchell describes the impact of this work, scored for an orchestra of percussion instruments:

> One of the most remarkable aspects of the Crusade, indeed, is the sharply etched musical depiction of the incidents which make up Brecht's searingly poignant narrative of the lost, wandering "five and fifty" children, harassed by war, blinded by blizzards, homeless and direction-less, their only aim to find a land "where peace reigns." The Crusade is a cantata, but the music is felt throughout with a dramatic intensity which brings to vivid life not only the

> principal figures in the band--the anxious leader, for example, the little Jew ("Velvet Collar"), the drummer-boy, or the boy from the Nazi Legation--but the events by which they are overtaken and the pitiful efforts they make to alleviate their plight.[37]

The work is scored for children's voices, two pianos, a small organ (chamber or electronic), two conductors, and two large groups of percussion. The solo group requires six players, while the tutti group should be "as large as possible" to play any number of nineteen different instruments. A three-page preface in the score explains details of notation, voices, percussion, and special instruments. Because of the pre-eminence of percussion in this work, and to demonstrate the relationship between the two groups and the way in which they are laid out in the score, the instruments are listed on the following page, in Table 3.

The three categories of the Tutti group,--1. Tuned, 2. Rhythmic, and 3. Clashed or Ringing--are listed as such in the score. This avoids the necessity of naming each instrument, and reduces the stave requirements to one staff for the Tuned section and two extra lines for the other two sections. The instruments of the solo group are specified by the player responsible, so that the fourth and fifth players sometimes have a complete staff when their tuned instruments are used, otherwise one line each suffices. The opening of the work is shown in Example 14 on page 44.

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[37] Donald Mitchell, brochure for Benjamin Britten: Children's Crusade, with the Wandsworth School Boys' Choir, conducted by Russell Burgess (Decca SET 445, 1970), p. 4.

TABLE 3

PERCUSSION INSTRUMENTS IN CHILDREN'S CRUSADE[38]

I SOLO GROUP:		
1st Player: Small Gong, Bass Drum (variable)* 2nd " : Cymbal (suspended), Wood Block 3rd " : Triangle, Side Drum 4th " : Tabor, Glockenspiel, Tambourine, Bells 5th " : Tenor Drum, Xylophone, Glockenspiel 6th " : Small Cymbal, Large Cymbal (suspended), Gong, Tamtam, Scraper* * --- Special Instruments, see below, (page 45).		
II TUTTI GROUP:		
"as large as possible, but care must be taken not to swamp the voices or other instruments." Any number of the following:		
1. TUNED Bells (tubular) Xylophone Vibraphone Glockenspiel Celesta etc.	2. RHYTHMIC Side Drum Tenor Drum Tabor Bass Drum Woodblocks Tambourine Castanets Rattle Triangle Cymbals (suspended) etc.	3. CLASHED OR RINGING: Cymbals (clashed) Triangle Gong or Tamtam Anvil Cowbells Sleighbells etc.

38 Benjamin Britten, Children's Crusade, Kinderkreuzzug Op. 82 A Ballad for children's voices and orchestra. Words by Bertolt Brecht, English translation by Hans Keller (London: Faber Music, 1972), pp. viii and 1.

Ex. 14. The Opening of Children's Crusade.

Traditional key and metre signatures are hardly used. Tempi, however, are indicated precisely with metronome markings, as they change throughout. Sometimes (score, p. 22) two different tempi occur simultaneously. The metrical and rhythmical non-alignment, together with the unmeasured tremolandi and notational irregularities, are further examples of Britten's "oriental" style, specifically developed during the writing of the church parables.

Two special instruments are required: one bass drum with variable pitch and another to imitate a dog's bark. James Blades describes in detail his attempts to fulfill these requirements. A notched bamboo scraper used in Latin American orchestras, the reso-reso, gave the most realistic sound for the dog, "Placed with the open end on a desk or a drum and 'rasped' with a steel rod, this 'primitive' instrument produced a healthy bark. When scraped gently with a pencil or the slender shaft of a xylophone beater a fainter 'woof' was produced."[39] The variable bass drum was much more difficult to find, and Blades had to experiment with several alternatives before he came up with a solution:

> I finally threaded a cord through the centre of a singleheaded drum and applied the tension by pulling the cord. An appreciable rise and fall was produced, leading me to secure the end of the gut

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[39] Blades, Drum Roll, p. 250.

> string to an upright post fixed to the side of the drum, and applying variable pressure to the string in the manner the pitch is changed on the double bass. When used in the orchestra one player varies the pressure on the gut string whilst simultaneously bowing it with a 'cello bow, while another performer plays a tremolo on the drumhead with two soft-headed drumsticks.[40]

The completed drum is illustrated below, in Figure 1.

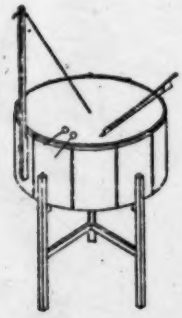

Fig. 1. Bass drum with variable pitch, Children's Crusade.

The work begins with a loud crash of all the instruments together, playing unmeasured, decreasing tremoli, as the chorus in recitative style introduces the story.[41] This crash, of solo and/or

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[40] Ibid., see also Example 14 for glissando in the score.

[41] Britten, Children's Crusade, pp. 1-16.

tutti groups followed by recitative, forms the unifying frame which recurs twice more during the work. The first recurrence is very soft and slow to illustrate the musing of a commentator on the story, "Whenever I close my eyes, I see them" (score, pp. 91-100). The last use of the framing device is at the end of the work (score, pp. 102-103), again very quiet and solemn, to emphasize the tragic notice dangling from the dog's "scraggy" neck: "Please come and help us! Where we are we cannot say ... the dog knows the way." Between these framing sections there are character sketches and dramatic events which form a continuous narrative.

Examples of associative scoring abound in this work. Apart from the obvious scraper representing the dog's bark, single instruments are chosen for other characters: the solo tambourine introduces the Little Jew; the bass drum gives a sombre picture of the Nazi boy; the triangle and tenor drum show the cheerful drummer boy, longing to play his drum but anxious that it should not betray the children's location. Groups of instruments portray different events: the metal group of gong, tamtam, bells, and vibraphone clang solemnly for the funeral of the Little Jew; drums, cymbals, tamtam, and woodblocks imitate the guns and bombs of the war that the children wander into.[42]

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[42] Compare this picture of war with the side drum's "stuttering rifles" and "wailing shells" in the tenor solo of the War Requiem, pp. 18-19.

Metal instruments with gamelan-like pianos introduce a reflective episode after the funeral ("So there was faith, there was hope too"). The dry membranes of the drums give a vivid impression of the lost children finding a signpost turned around in the snow: the alternate drum taps of tenor drum, bass drum, tabor, and side drum indicate their indecision in looking for the way to go (score, pp. 78-80). The only adult that the children encounter, a dying soldier, is characterized by the pianos, more "adult" instruments than the multiple percussion.

For this bleak story of wartime refugees, Britten's percussion orchestra was an inspired choice. Historical associations with both soldiers and children make these instruments a most appropriate vehicle for a work about children attempting to escape the ravages of war. In addition, the use of percussion enables a large group of children to perform the work themselves, although the impact of this work is far from childish. As Donald Mitchell points out: "Surely it is the case here that, though Britten uses children as performers and marvellously exploits their musical abilities, the musical experience the work reveals is of an order quite distinct from the actual nature of the forces employed."[43]

There remain three non-staged works with percussion, written in 1974, 1975, and 1976. A Time There Was--Suite on English Folktunes, Op. 90 is a cheerful work which employs percussion in all except one of its

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[43] Mitchell, brochure for Children's Crusade, p. 4.

five sections. The timpani opens the first movement with a boisterous rhythm in $\frac{12}{8}$, setting the tempo and pitch. A bell is used with the horns and harp in the second movement, and the tamburo has a dominating ostinato throughout Hankin Booby, the third movement (score, p. 40-41). The timpani part (with side drum and bass drum) in the final song, Lord Melbourne is as much tonal as rhythmical, as it has a slowly rising chromatic scale, over several bars.[44]

Phaedra, a dramatic cantata for mezzo-soprano and small orchestra, employs three metal instruments, timpani, and two drums. There is a transparent texture throughout, and the different colours of bell, cymbal, gong, timpani, and tenor and bass drums are clearly discernible. Dry timbres are produced from the gong and timpani by the use of hard sticks and, in one instance, a ruthe-switch.[45] Phaedra's madness is conveyed by an ostinato pattern played on the cymbal, bass drum, and tenor drum (score, pp. 11, 16, 19, and 38). This is one of the composer's most economical scores, with dramatic effects created through timing and contrast.

Welcome Ode, Op. 95 for young people's chorus and orchestra is a five-movement work of approximately eight minutes duration. Two of the movements are purely instrumental. The first of these, the Jig, has a cumulative texture with different instruments added gradually

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[44] Benjamin Britten, Suite on English Folk Tunes. 'A Time There Was...,' Op. 90. (London: Faber Music, 1976), pp. 50-51.

[45] Benjamin Britten, Phaedra, Op. 93 (London: Faber Music, 1977), p. 36.

until the final tutti. This cumulative instrumentation in the rest of the orchestra is also followed in the writing for percussion. The triangle is the only percussion instrument for eight bars.[46] A solo ostinato for the side drum follows, joined by the tambourine and then by the timpani. There is no percussion used in the second instrumental movement, Modulation. This was Britten's last completed work, finished four months before he died in December, 1976.

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[46] Benjamin Britten, Welcome Ode, Op. 95 for Young People's Chorus and Orchestra (London: Faber Music, 1977), pp. 14-21.

CHAPTER II

PERCUSSION IN THREE FULL-SCALE OPERAS

The growing importance of percussion in Britten's staged works can be followed through three of the full-scale operas. Peter Grimes (1945) was his first and most famous example of this medium. Death in Venice (1973) was his last operatic venture. Both of these operas deal with tragedy, the plight of an individual at odds with society, struggling against the psychological and physical destruction that inevitably awaits him. A Midsummer Night's Dream (1960) comes from the middle period of Britten's creative output, and, as a comedy, provides a contrast to the other two works. Although it uses a smaller orchestra and has fewer choruses, it is considered a full-scale rather than a chamber opera. The intricacies of the plot, the full-bodied treatment of orchestral and vocal forces, and its length of nearly two-and-a-half hours make it comparable with the other larger operas.

PETER GRIMES

So much has been written on the subject of Peter Grimes that it would be superfluous to include yet another synopsis and character study of the opera. However, Arthur Oldham's description of its first reception serves as a reminder of its significance in the history of opera:

> The impact on the musical world of the first performance of Peter Grimes on 7th June, 1945, at Sadler's Wells Theatre, was immense. At first the reaction was astonishment. Later it changed to delight mingled with apprehension.

> The explanations followed. The majority of people before that night would not have believed it possible that an English composer was about to make a contribution to operatic literature which would not only be on a level equal to the highest contemporary musical standards, but become a major box-office attraction in the repertory of theatres throughout the world. Since the death of Purcell, many English composers had attempted to do the same thing; all, to a greater or lesser degree, had failed.[1]

Thirty-four years after the opera's premiere, Peter Grimes is still a "major box-office attraction" and has become part of the standard repertoire of the major opera houses of the world. Its success has stimulated other contemporary English composers to venture into this medium. "Peter Grimes was universally recognized as a symbol of the renascence of English opera; and its success went far to break down the inferiority under which English opera had laboured for so many years."[2]

This opera is written for a large cast and orchestra, including an off-stage pipe-organ and dance-band. In addition to the timpanist, two performers are required to play thirteen percussion instruments, four of which are pitched. The percussion instrumentation consists of timpani, side drum, tenor drum, bass drum, tambourine, cymbal, triangle, gong, whip, rattle, xylophone, tubular bells, and celesta.

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[1] Arthur Oldham, "Peter Grimes: The Music; the Story not Excluded," Benjamin Britten: A Commentary on His Works from a Group of Specialists, eds. Donald Mitchell and Hans Keller (New York: Philosophical Library, 1952), p. 101. Synopses and character studies for this opera can be found in this work and in books by Eric Walter White, Patricia Howard, and Charles Stuart. Excellent analyses of Peter Grimes by Peter Evans, R. Gary Deavel, and Peter Garvie are also listed in the Bibliography.

[2] Eric Walter White, The Rise of English Opera, with an introduction by Benjamin Britten (New York: Philosophical Library, 1951), p. 168.

In spite of the number of instruments required, the percussion writing is concentrated mainly on the timpani and other drums and the cymbal. The rattle is heard only once, at the beginning of the last interlude, and the pitched instruments other than the timpani are reserved for special effects.

The Interludes

The six orchestral interludes which separate the scenes of the three acts are much more than merely instrumental pauses in the drama. They are highly diverse in their formal structure, style, and texture. The first, third, and fifth interludes function as prologues to each act, introducing a musical picture of the time of day in which the following scene takes place. The second, fourth, and sixth interludes are more profound commentaries on the action and serve as cumulative images of Grimes' psychological disintegration. Three of the interludes are evocative seascapes conveying the mood of the sea at dawn, in a storm, and in moonlight.

The first of the six interludes conveys a sound-picture of the sea at dawn. Its structure consists of the alternation of three motivically contrasted sections played by different instrumental groups.[3] It demonstrates Britten's tendency to divide his orchestra into different chamber-sized groups instead of concentrating on massive tutti

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[3] This louvred type of orchestration is most apparent in Britten's next work, The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra, and in the Spring Symphony (see above, Chap. I, pp. 20 and 27).

effects. The first motive is announced by the flutes and violins. This is followed by the second motive of arpeggii from the clarinets, harp, and violas. This wave-like effect is further enhanced by a quiet roll on the suspended cymbal (played with a soft stick) which evokes the seaspray. This use of the cymbal is one of the most memorable sound-pictures of the whole opera:[4]

Lento e tranquillo

Ex. 15. Seaspray effect in Interlude 1. Peter Grimes.[5]

The third motive of the interlude consists of slow sostenuto chords played by the brass, bassoons, and the lower strings. These are supported by tremoli from the timpani and bass drum which provide a mysterious, shuddering quality. These three motives, played consecutively, make up a remarkable picture of the quiet sea in early morning and continue into scene i as the background for the opening chorus, "Oh hang at open doors the net, the cork." This interlude music recurs, as a characteristic framing device, at the end of the opera. Several days later it is early morning once more, and the final chorus uses the same melody for "To

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[4] "Has a cymbal note ever conveyed so eerily and overwhelmingly the salt and sound of remote surf on a lonely shore?" See Charles Stuart, Peter Grimes, Covent Garden Operas Series (London: Boosey and Hawkes, 1947), p. 5.

[5] Benjamin Britten, Peter Grimes. An Opera in Three Acts and a Prologue derived from the poem of George Crabbe Op. 33. Words by Montague Slater (London: Boosey and Hawkes, 1963), p. 27.

those who pass, the Borough sounds betray the cold beginning of another day." The villagers go about their work as before, apparently oblivious that they have driven Grimes to sink himself and his boat out at sea. The listener is left with this image of the sea, the splash of foam from the cymbal, the strong ebb and flow of the tide suggested by timpani and bass drum rolls.

The second interlude is also a seascape, but this one shows the fury of a storm.[6] It is a dramatic evocation on three levels: it evokes the natural elements overwhelming the village, the villagers' growing anger towards Grimes, and Grimes' internalized savage distress. Unlike the first interlude, the percussion is here used throughout. There is an expressive part for pedal timpani, which gives rhythmic and harmonic support to the main theme played by the strings. There are substantial parts for the gong, side-drum, and tambourine in addition to those for the timpani, bass drum, and cymbal.[7]

The second interlude is a massive four-part rondo extending through thirty-two pages (score, pp. 135-168). Part of the opening theme, which recurs three times, is shown in Example 16 on page 56, with

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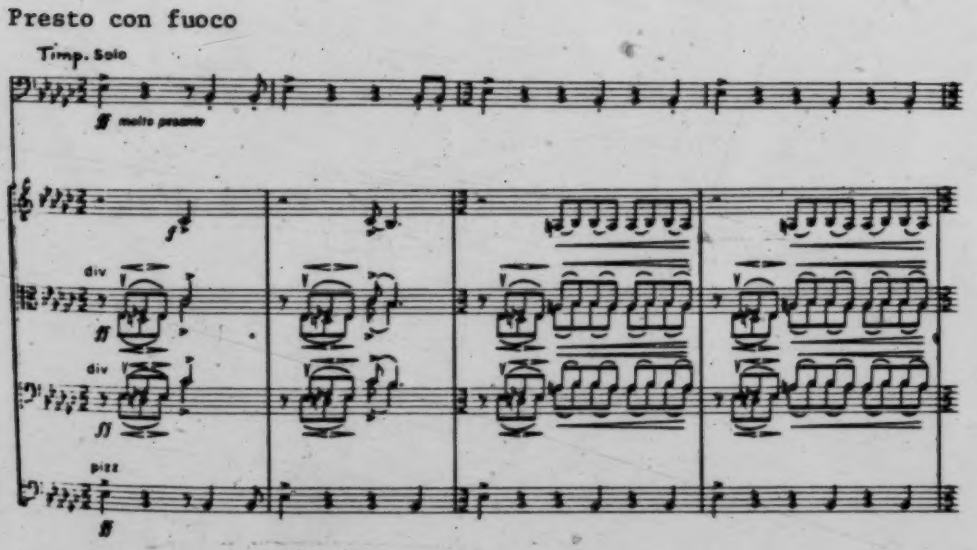
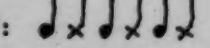
[6] Storms on the East coast of England still bring floods, fear, and destruction to the inhabitants: the Moot Hall in Aldeburgh used to stand in the middle of the town, but now it is almost at the edge of the beach. In 1953 severe storms and floods left 32,000 homeless and 307 dead in this area. Protective sand-banks were built to repair the sea walls, and government assistance was required for the survivors.

[7] There is a fine recording of the second Interlude (with clearer percussion than on the Decca recording of the complete opera) performed by Bernstein and the New York Philharmonic on A Tribute to Benjamin Britten (Columbia 34529, 1977).

the timpani's rhythmic and harmonic emphasis (score, p. 135).



Ex. 16. Opening bars of Interlude II (timpani, lower strings only).

The pattern of the rondo is ABACADA. As the storm builds, more percussion instruments are used in each successive section. The bass drum's ominous rumble is heard first in section B. In section C the gong and side-drum are added to it. Here the side drum's alternative beats are "on the rim":  giving added impetus to the rising tension. With the storm at its height, in section D, timpani, cymbal, and tambourine appear with the previous instruments (excluding the gong). Although this climax of the interlude contains the thickest texture of tutti scoring, the percussion instruments are played consecutively rather than simultaneously, or in pairs of contrasting tone colour. Bass drum rolls and a cymbal clash alternate with rapid staccato eighth-notes from the timpani and side drum. Tre-

moli on the tambourine convey the howling wind and rising waves. In the last twenty-three bars of gradual crescendo the bass drum plays reiterated triplets with side drum sticks, yielding to a long tremolo on the suspended cymbal, played with soft sticks. The whole orchestra ends with a loud staccato chord, as the curtain rises on scene ii, inside The Boar Inn. The paired drums and tambourine are illustrated below in Example 17 (score, p. 159).

Ex. 17. Paired percussion in the "Storm" interlude.

Two aspects of these final bars of the interlude are characteristic of Britten's methods for achieving dramatic impact. Both methods have already been noted in connection with the non-staged works, and they occur again in subsequent operas of this study. The first is the long tremolo with crescendo by the cymbal, previously encountered in Canadian Carnival (1939), and appearing again in Cantata Academica (1959), (see above, Chap. I, pp. 14 and 31). The second aspect is the tutti crescendo to a loud chord, which then leaves a single percussion instrument as the only accompaniment to solo voices. At this point in Peter Grimes, the climax of the storm gives way to a tremolo from the bass drum as the sole background to Mrs. Sedley's and Auntie's recitative.

The music of Interlude II extends into the following scene, in the Boar's Inn, but it is restricted to occasions when different people enter the inn. Each time they struggle with the door, the storm music blows in with them, like the raging wind and rain, until they manage to fasten the door securely against it.

The third interlude, at the beginning of Act II, is in ternary form. In contrast with the "Storm" interlude, but in common with Interlude I, it produces the quiet mood of an early morning. It is Sunday, and the village and the sea are at rest. The overall calm effect comes from an ostinato of overlapping thirds, rising and falling, played by the horns. This gives a strange impression of bells, which in fact are heard at the beginning of the following scene. Restrained use is made of the percussion, only the cymbal and timpani being required. This interlude also does not end with the opening of scene 1. After the curtain rises, the orchestra continues to evoke a cheerful picture of Sunday morning. Church bells announce the service of Matins, which then commences with a hymn accompanied by an offstage pipe-organ (score, p. 254).

Between the raising of the curtain and the first hymn, there are ten pages of music for church bells. The first five pages (score, pp. 243-248) contain the interlude music, with an off-stage church bell in B-flat and gong providing rhythmic support. As the organ begins, the gong ceases, and the church bell (now on E-flat) commences a continuous beat of half-notes through the last five pages (score, pp.

249-253). This is a faithful reproduction of the sound to be heard in most English country towns, at approximately 10:55 a.m. on any Sunday morning, when a single bell rings to remind latecomers that the service is about to begin.[8]

This last section of the interlude demonstrates an example of the monocolouring function of metal percussion (the cymbal is occasionally heard, as well as the gong and bells). Similar examples of this function by metallophones have been observed in the non-staged works (the Spring Symphony [1949], Cantata Academica [1959], and the War Requiem [1961]; see Chap. I). The most celebrated example of bell writing in Britten's operatic works occurs in The Turn of the Screw (1954) (see Chap. III). Except for the introduction to Canadian Carnival (1939) (where two cymbals only were used), the third interlude of Peter Grimes contains the first appearance of metal percussion in a monocolouring role in Britten's works.

Interlude IV is one of Britten's most famous passacaglias. It is published separately as Opus 33 and it is often performed with the Four Sea Interludes, op. 33B in orchestral programs. There are forty statements of the ground, which is a modified version of Grimes' cry of despair after he has struck Ellen during their argument in the first

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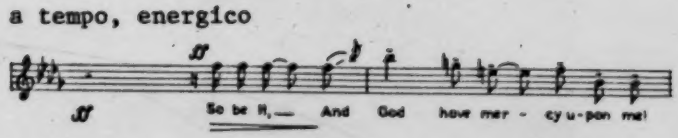
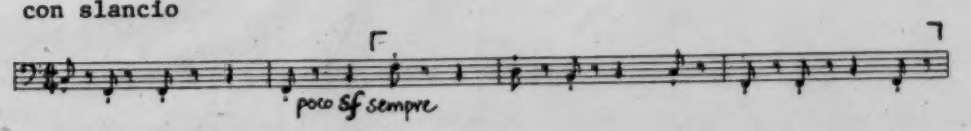
[8] Many English churches, including Aldeburgh, still have a peal of at least eight bells, which are usually rung on Sundays and festivals. The skilled art of bell-ringing continues to be a cherished hobby for Englishmen, and bell-ringing teams frequently travel to distant churches to compete with each other.

scene of Act II. This "fate" motive[9] is shown in Example 18 (score, p. 282).



Ex. 18. Peter's "Fate" motive, Act II, scene i.

The ground of the passacaglia extends this motive from four beats to eleven. This enables each successive statement to start on a different beat in the bar, an example of Britten's interest in metrical freedom. The thirty-fifth statement of the ground, by the timpani, is shown in Example 19 (score, p. 362).



Ex. 19. Passacaglia: statement of the ground by timpani.

In this interlude, seven different percussion instruments are used, but of these only the drums are given major parts in announcing the ground. The timpani contributes melodic as well as rhythmic statements in the last five repetitions. Since the tenor drum is unpitched,

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[9] R. Gary Deavel, "A Study of Two Operas by Benjamin Britten: Peter Grimes and The Turn of the Screw" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Rochester, 1970), p. 84.

it beats the rhythm only, in statements 19-24. The side drum, also unpitched, plays the rhythm of the ground in statements 28 and 29, and is accompanied by the tambourine to give extra colour and rhythmic contrast.

Part of the complete statement of the ground consists of two short tremoli, played by percussion, over the repeated final F. Each time the announcing instruments of the ground are changed, the percussion instrument which plays the tremoli is changed also. For example, statements 1 through 11 are announced by cellos and double-basses, with timpani tremoli. In statements 12 to 14, the ground is played by bassoons, double-bassoon, horns, tuba, cellos, and basses. These statements use tremoli by the bass-drum only. Statements 15 to 18 are given to the solo harp, and the tremoli are now played by the gong. It is only in the last three statements that an additional percussion instrument is used for the tremoli. Here, the suspended cymbal joins the bass drum. In all previous statements of the ground, only one percussion instrument at a time was given this function. In Example 20, the fifteenth statement of the ground is shown, played by the harp and gong (score, p. 354).

Ex. 20. Harp and Gong, statement 15 of the passacaglia.

The economical use of percussion instruments for the tremoli as well as in statements of the ground indicates once more Britten's preference for consecutive changes of tone colour rather than for the

composite sound of the instruments played simultaneously. In addition, this interlude shows the use of monocolouring function by the membranophones, in contrast to the metallophones used in Interlude III. Four of the seven percussion instruments are drums, which monopolize percussion statements of the ground and the tremoli effect. There occur only two examples out of forty where non-drums play the tremoli. These instruments are the gong (see Example 20 on page 61) and the suspended cymbal at the end of the passacaglia. The tambourine provides a mixed colour of membrane and metal and is used for neither statement nor tremoli function.

The passacaglia ends as the curtain rises on Act II, scene ii, when Grimes enters his hut in a "towering rage." The passacaglia, with Grimes' "fate" motive as a ground, accentuates his obsessive state of mind and the inexorable fate that awaits him. By using the same motive as in the previous chorus "Grimes is at his exercise" (score, pp. 283-304), Britten conveys the grim determination of the villagers to destroy Grimes.

The fifth interlude, at the beginning of Act III, is the last of the sea-pictures, entitled "Moonlight" in the separate publication of the interludes. It is monothematic, with sustained syncopated chords indicating the quiet surge of the sea on a moonlit night. For half the length of the interlude (score, pp. 396-406), no percussion is used at all. Then, against a background of tremoli on the timpani, the xylophone suggests splashes of moonbeams reflected on the wavetops. Its octave leaps are doubled by the flute, piccolo, and harp. The brittle tone

of the xylophone is particularly effective here, and comes as a surprise after the previous lack of percussion (score, p. 404):

Andante comodo e rubato

Ex. 21. Xylophone indicating reflected light, Interlude V.

Like the celesta the xylophone makes only rare appearances in this opera. Apart from its use in this interlude, the only other substantial part for it occurs in Act I, scene i. There again, it is reserved for a special effect: the click of the capstan as Balstrode and Keene help haul in Grimes' boat (score, pp. 62-66). The interlude in Act III ends with the opening of scene i, where the Barn Dance takes over.

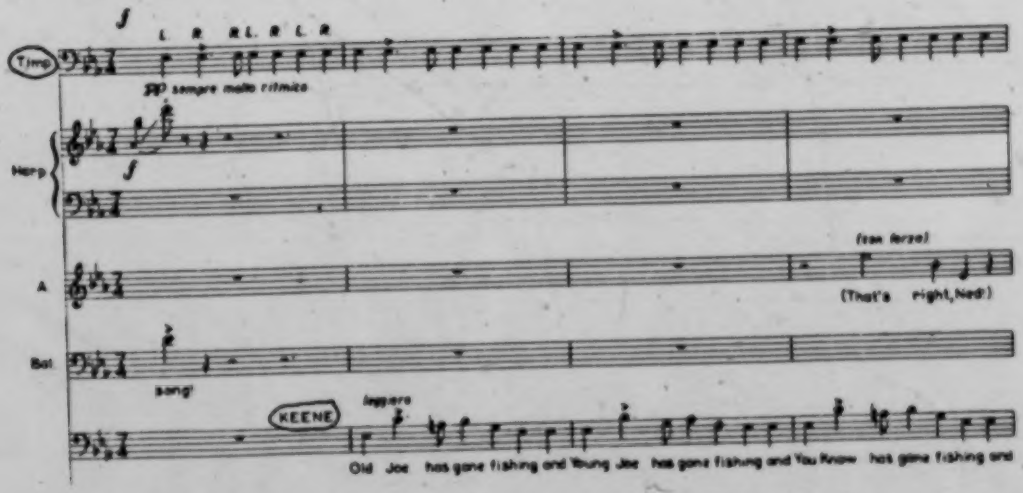
The sixth and final interlude is the shortest and least structured. It extends over only four pages of full score (score, pp. 484-488) and contains distorted motives from the whole opera. It acts as a short prelude to Grimes' disintegration, before he enters exhausted and insane to sing his last soliloquy. Once again very little percussion is used. The timpani is required in the first four bars. In the middle of the interlude, the tambourine has a long tremolo, ending with a short rising motive from the xylophone. As in the previous interlude, the xylophone is doubled with the flute, piccolo, and harp. No other percussion is used. It is as if all the storm, fury, and strength of

the preceding events of the drama have done their worst and subsided. The dramatic temperature has dropped to allow the final dénouement to be enacted with greater impact.

The Vocal Music

Timpani and drums are the chief percussion instruments used to accompany the voices. They provide rhythmic support and additional colour, mainly in recitatives and choruses. Many of the concerted ensembles and solo arias contain no percussion at all. Its absence is a conscious technique used by Britten to create as much dramatic effect as its presence does. A striking example occurs in Act I, scene ii at The Boar Inn. The feeling of the villagers has hardened against Grimes, and Boles has picked a fight with him. To reduce the tension, Ned Keene starts a round, "Old Joe has gone fishing." The timpani is chosen as the sole instrument to keep all the voices in strict rhythm, and (with the double-bass) provides the tonic base of E-flat. The importance of the timpani here is shown by Britten's precise indications of sticking technique for each hand. The first bars of the rhythmical ostinato are illustrated in Example 22, on page 65 (score, p. 205). As each voice enters in turn, the timpani resumes the ostinato phrase, thus holding the whole round together. However, as soon as Grimes tries to join in (score, p. 216), off-key, out of rhythm, and with different words, the stable influence of the timpani ceases. The strings, chorus, and ensemble try to keep going, but the round is upset. Only when Grimes is overwhelmed (score, p. 220), does the timpani recommence its rhythm

Con slancio!



Ex. 22. Timpani ostinato in the Round, "Old Joe."

and the round regain its proper key and proportions. Grimes' disturbing power and his alienation from the rest of the crowd are dramatically demonstrated by the absence of the timpani. Earlier in the same scene, these aspects of Grimes' character are shown by a similar device. Storm music, followed by long solo timpani rolls, coincide with his entry into the inn (score, pp. 193-196). The chorus sings "Talk of the devil, and there he is," accompanied only by the timpani's tremolo. Grimes then sings his visionary aria, "Now the Great Bear and Pleiades," supported by the strings, with the timpani noticeably absent (score, p. 196).

In the recitatives, the percussion often highlights the character of the person singing and underlines the dramatic situation, sometimes simultaneously. In the courtroom scene of the Prologue, for instance, the pomposity of the lawyer Swallow and the solemnity of the occasion are aptly conveyed by the bass drum. In Act I, scene i, Hobson

describes his job as carter: "I have to go from pub to pub, picking up parcels," and the tambourine adds the sound of his horse's jingling harness. Then, as Ellen decides to go with him to collect the apprentice, she sings the same melody to the same accompaniment of the tambourine (score, pp. 72 and 75).[10] In the same scene, Balstrode advises Grimes to move away from the town or marry Ellen. During this dialogue, the side drum, bass drum, and timpani hint at the rising anger between the two men, and at the storm gathering around them (score, pp. 105-118). At one particular point, the solo timpani is given the dual function of expressing Grimes' agitation and the menace of the villagers' gossip. This is effected by a sudden increase in dynamics, with a rising glissando followed by a rapid decrescendo on a constant roll. It is illustrated in Example 23 on page 67 (score, p. 112).

In the unmeasured recitatives in Act I, scene ii, there are further indications of Britten's interest in freeing rhythm from the regular metrical framework. Sung senza misura, most of these recitatives are accompanied only by tremoli from a single percussion instrument. The bass drum supports Mrs. Sedley's and Auntie's dialogue (score, pp. 168-169). Side drum rolls support Balstrode's remarks (score, pp. 169-170), immediately followed by tremoli from the cymbal, as he berates

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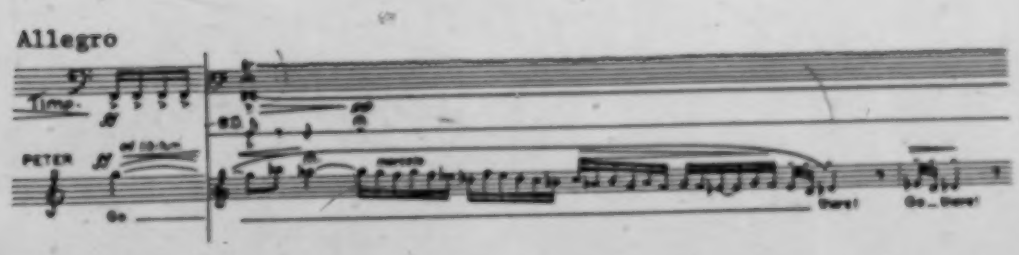
[10] Four years later, Britten again used the tambourine to suggest horse's harness, in "The Driving Boy" in his Spring Symphony (see Chap. I, p. 27).

Ex. 23. Solo timpani in recitative, Act I, scene 1.

Auntie for leaving the window shutters open (score, pp. 172-175). Ned Keene and Mrs. Sedley are accompanied by the solo tambourine (score, pp. 192-193). At the climax of the passacaglia in Act II, there is another example of this effect. Grimes follows his apprentice into the

hut "in a towering rage." He shouts "Go there!" to an unmeasured, melismatic phrase which rushed down furiously for almost two octaves. The only accompaniment is a soft tremolo from the timpani. The contrast thus produced is electric. Grimes' melisma is shown below in Example 24 (score, p. 366).



Ex. 24. Unmeasured melisma with timpani roll, Act II, scene ii.

Once again Britten has raised the tension by the preceding crescendo and tutti scoring of an interlude, only to heighten the dramatic effect of Grimes' entrance and outburst by removing the rest of the orchestra at this point and interrupting the metrical beat.

In the choruses, which form a substantial part of the opera, percussion is featured in several different ways. No percussion at all occurs in some choruses. In these, the voices have enough rhythmic impulse to lessen the need for additional support. One example is the pub scene in Act I, where the villagers sing self-righteously, "We live and let live, and look we keep our hands to ourselves" (score, pp. 187-191). In the first scene of act II, where the people begin to express their hate for Grimes, the chorus "Grimes is at his exercise" is also without percussion (score, pp. 293-304).

In choruses connected with the sea, such as the opening chorus of Act I and the ensemble and chorus "Now the flood tide" in the same scene, the drums and cymbal give added impetus, colour, and tension. In the first one, the voices are accompanied by the sea music of the "Dawn" Interlude, with timpani and cymbal (see above, p. 53). In the second, Balstrode introduces the ensemble and chorus "Now the flood tide," which expresses the villagers' anxiety at the growing storm (score, p. 87). At first the timpani marks the entry of each voice part with a single beat, preceded by a drag: . After the fifth and last voice of the ensemble has entered with the same theme, the side drum and bass drum are added. As the ensemble and chorus combine homorhythmically, the rhythm of the side drum becomes more insistent. A loud clash of the cymbal fortissisimo and crescendo from the timpani illustrate the words "Look, the storm cone" (score, p. 96). The storm motive is then announced by the strings, followed by the timpani (score, pp. 97 and 99). This motive becomes the basis of the "Storm" Interlude before the next scene. The repetitive rhythm, with which the strings and timpani build up the tension to the climax of the chorus, is shown in Example 25 (score, p. 99).

Finally, ensemble and chorus sing loudly "O tide, that waits for no man, spare our coasts!" This phrase is sung unaccompanied, alternating with the orchestra, which includes side drum, cymbal, and timpani. The emphasis of the text is effectively heightened by the colour contrast between the voices and the instruments. This is another example of the louvred texture first seen in the "Dawn" Interlude.

Ex. 25. Storm rhythm by timpani, chorus Act I.

Already in this first opera, Britten reserves his pitched metallophones for special effects of a supernatural or other-worldly character.[11] The bells convey the religious atmosphere of the church

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[11] This tendency occurs again in The Turn of the Screw, and A Midsummer Night's Dream, and it increases in his later operas. In The Turn of the Screw, the celesta represents the ghost, Peter Quint, and in A Midsummer Night's Dream it indicates the magic spell of Oberon.

service in Act II. The celesta, which is used only once during the whole work, acts as an instrument of horror. In the second scene of Act II, Grimes' apprentice slips, screams, and falls down the cliff. At this moment of dramatic tension, Britten again reduces the orchestral sound. The celesta, with only a single desk of violas and cellos, "babbles prettily and inarticulately of death"[12] and literally dies away down the scale to end the Act. The harp technique, bisbigliando, indicated for the celesta here, is particularly appropriate: a reiterated finger movement, giving a soft tremolo (score, p. 391):

Ex. 26. Solo Celesta at the Boy's death, Act II, scene ii.

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[12] Charles Stuart, Peter Grimes, p. 27.

There are many instances which show Britten's skill in using certain instruments to illuminate the text and to convey a particular atmosphere. Some of these have already been discussed: the xylophone representing the click of the capstan, the sea-spray from the cymbal, the horse's harness from the tambourine, the church bells, and the celesta. The whip is used succinctly to express a violent threat by Grimes towards his apprentice ("I'll tear the collar off your neck," score, p. 368) and to make the sound of a door slammed shut (Auntie, in Act III, scene i, score, p. 452).

Several instruments are played outside the orchestra pit, either behind the scenes or on stage. They contribute directly to the sound picture in which the action takes place. Hobson's drum is played on stage in both scenes of Act II, and its symbolism is especially powerful. In the first scene the tenor drum solo--like African "talking" drums--summons the people to gather at a particular place: Grimes' hut. It also harks back to the ancient Town Crier in England, as well as having the military association of drums signalling the attack of troops and accompanying their marches into battle. These associations, together with the repetitive march rhythm of Hobson's drum, are particularly effective in communicating the villagers' vengeful intention of seeking out and destroying Grimes. Part of the rhythm and words are shown in Example 27 on page 73 (score, p. 337).

In the next scene, in Grimes' hut, the distant Hobson's drum rhythm becomes more insistent as the crowd approaches. While giving an ominous warning to Grimes, the drum also underlines his fantasy of the

Ex. 27. Hobson's drum and Chorus, Act II, scene i.

previous apprentice who died at sea (score, pp. 379-380). It is ironic that the same instrument actually precipitates the tragedy of the second apprentice's death. As Grimes hears the approaching drum, he realizes that the crowd is coming to get him and urges the boy out onto the cliff, warning him to take care not to fall. Knocking is heard on the door (an unusual technique from the tenor drum), and as Grimes hesitates, the boy slips and falls (score, pp. 390-391).

The Dances

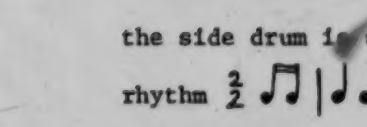
The stage band plays off-stage in the first scene of Act III. Its main function, whether playing alone or with the regular orchestra, is to provide the dances for the villagers in the Moot Hall. The four dances are authentic country dances of the mid-nineteenth century: Barn Dance, Ländler, Hornpipe, and Galop. Percussion instruments give a characteristic quality to each one in turn. In the Barn Dance, side drum, bass drum, and suspended cymbal provide rhythmic support and colour contrast to two clarinets, solo violin, and double-bass. They are played in succession in a fixed pattern which coincides with the symmetrical four-bar phrase of the other instruments. The phrase has two sections with open and closed endings. In the first section the bass drum plays alternate beats with the side drum. In the second section the bass drum plays the first three beats, leaving the cymbal for the final beat. This effect is reminiscent of many old-time dance hall bands. The first phrase of the Barn Dance is shown in Example 28 on page 75 (score, p. 406).

There follows a humorous duet in $\frac{12}{8}$ metre between the Two Nieces and the lawyer, Swallow. Between the Nieces' jaunty phrases, the stage band interjects a sharp chord on the fourth beat (score, p. 408). The bass drum and cymbal, played together at this point, bring to mind a dance band drum-set, where a movement by each foot would give a thump on the bass drum and a clash from the high-hat cymbal at the same moment. Swallow's lugubrious flirtation with the girls, couched in legal language, is accompanied by timpani, harp, and strings from the regular orchestra in the pit. As both Nieces escape from Swallow, the three percussion

Ex. 28. Barn Dance, Clarinet and Percussion.

instruments of the stage band have a solo which exaggerates the buffoonery between the three characters. This solo also illustrates a traditional function of percussion as a transition between different musical sections. In this way the duet is linked with a short orchestral interlude before the second dance (score, p. 417).

In the Ländler, the slow waltz rhythm is supported by regular beats of the cymbal, without the drums. Mrs. Sedley's chromatic melody, "Murder most foul it is," is accompanied by the bass drum and long tremoli on the suspended cymbal. This gives a faithful imitation of traditional melodrama (score, pp. 424-426).

The third dance is a Hornpipe. In typical nautical style, the side drum is used for this centuries-old sailors' dance. The rhythm  continues through the ensuing chorus of Burgesses, "Goodnight, good people, goodnight!" (score, pp. 429-436).

The last dance, a Galop, acts as a backdrop to Mrs. Sedley's argument with Auntie. It also heightens the excitement of the gathering crowd, as a posse is raised to apprehend Grimes. Once more, the percussion is used in a different manner. The dance commences with a long tremolo on the side drum, followed by rhythmical beats of the bass drum (score, pp. 446-458).

As the macabre chorus "Him who despises us, we'll destroy" develops, the stage band gives way to the rest of the orchestra. The bass drum keeps the rhythm going as the texture thickens and the tension rises. The side drum adds a brighter and more urgent character to the chorus. The gong seems to signal Grimes' doom as the crowd laughs malevolently, "We'll make the murderer pay." Timpani played with wooden sticks and cymbal interject between cries of "Peter Grimes." Finally the whip and rattle are added, as the last interlude leads into the closing scene of Peter's mental and physical destruction.

This opera makes diverse and highly effective use of the percussion ensemble. Drums and cymbal are featured more than the other instruments, and have significant parts in depicting the sea and the storm. Monocolouring functions are given to the metallophones for the first time in the interludes. Percussion is used at points of great

dramatic tension as the sole accompaniment for the voice after an orchestral tutti. Britten's search for metrical freedom is assisted by percussion, as exemplified in the unmeasured recitatives. Different percussion instruments contribute to the characterization of the main singing roles. Percussion instruments are usually played consecutively rather than simultaneously, a technique that provides colour contrast with the voices, orchestra, and other percussion instruments. Percussion enhances the text and heightens the dramatic atmosphere. The pitched instruments are usually reserved for special effects. The symbolic use of particular instruments adds immeasurably to the impact of the drama on the audience. Percussion is occasionally used independently, but usually in conjunction with the voices or other orchestral instruments. The more technical functions, such as harmonic, rhythmic, and dynamic support, are still provided by the percussion, but Britten shows his more imaginative ambition for this section of the orchestra by exploiting its sonorities and by giving it a full part in the dramatic expression of the opera.

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

In the fifteen years between Peter Grimes and A Midsummer Night's Dream Britten's skill in writing for the theatre had been demonstrated in a variety of dramatic works. During this time he completed the three chamber operas (discussed in Chap. III), two full-scale operas (Billy Budd and Gloriana), The Beggar's Opera, The Little Sweep (for children), a three-act ballet (The Prince of the Pagodas), and his first experiment

in church drama (Noye's Fludde). To appreciate the chronological development of his percussion writing it is therefore important to emphasize that A Midsummer Night's Dream was the first opera written after The Turn of the Screw (see Chap. III). Britten's subsequent operas all belong to his final period of work, distinguished by transparent textures and evocative percussive effects: the church parables (see Chap. IV), Owen Wingrave, and Death in Venice.

Britten wrote A Midsummer Night's Dream to celebrate the structural improvements made in 1959 to the Jubilee Hall in his home town of Aldeburgh. As a result of the increased facilities of the hall, he provided for an orchestra of twenty-seven players. This was considerably more than the usual English Opera Group ensemble of thirteen soloists for whom he had written the three chamber operas. However, since the hall was still relatively small (seating capacity 316), it would not accommodate the full complement of musicians required in his larger operas such as Peter Grimes, Billy Budd, and Gloriana (1953). A Midsummer Night's Dream can therefore be considered as a compromise between chamber and full-scale opera. The scoring is given in Table 4 on page 79.

It will be noted that of the sixteen percussion instruments listed, eight of them, including the celesta, are metallophones which make up half the number of the whole percussion section. In addition the proportion of metal instruments to drums has increased to 8:5. These proportions are revealing in comparison with those shown in the chamber operas (see Chap. III, p. 112), and they lead to three important observations. Firstly, Britten has expanded the number and variety of percussion instruments

TABLE 4

SCORING FOR A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM	
2 Flutes (doubling Piccolos) 1 Oboe (doubling English Horn) 2 Clarinets, 1 Bassoon	2 Horns, 1 Trumpet, 1 Trombone 2 Harps, Strings (minimum 4222) Harpsichord and Celesta (one player)
Percussion (2 Players): Triangle, Cymbal, Gong, Vibraphone, Glockenspiel, Xylophone, 2 Bells, Tambourine, 2 Woodblocks, Timpani, Side drum, Tenor drum, Bass drum, Tamburo in F-sharp	
Stage Band: Sopranino recorders, small cymbals, 2 Woodblocks.	

required in this opera beyond the requirements of any of the previous operas under discussion. Secondly, the emphasis on the membranophones in his earlier operas Peter Grimes and The Rape of Lucretia has now been shifted to the metallophones.[13] Finally, the incidence of a large number of metal instruments is significant in relation to the dominant role played by supernatural characters in A Midsummer Night's Dream.

The five acts of Shakespeare's play were skilfully reduced to three by Britten and Peter Pears, keeping about half the original text intact. The action of the opera takes place mainly in the wood with only one change of location, to the Duke's court in Athens at the end of Act III. The drama proceeds on three levels at once, with only tenuous

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[13] Britten's tendency, to introduce more metal instruments into works written after his visit to Asia in 1956 has been noted in Chap. I.

interaction between each until the last act. Each group of characters, the Fairies, Lovers, and Rustics, has its own separate vocal range, associated instruments, narrative, and musical style. The Fairies provide the animating function for the whole drama. They are characterized by unusual vocal types and high voices: counter-tenor, coloratura-soprano, speaking acrobat, and boys' trebles. Their associated instruments are harps, harpsichord, celesta, and percussion. Their musical style is impressionistic and their supernatural power over the two groups of mortals is indicated by their opening and closing choruses which frame the opera. The representative voices, instruments, and styles of the respective groups are shown below in Table 5.

TABLE 5

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE THREE GROUPS IN A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

Roles	Associated Instruments	Voices	Ambitus, Type, Style
Fairies	Harps, Harpsichord Celesta, Percussion	Counter-tenor Coloratura-Soprano Boy acrobat (speaking) 4 Boy trebles	High, supernatural, impressionistic
Lovers (Mortals)	Woodwind, Strings	Tenor, Baritone, Mezzo-Soprano Soprano	Middle, natural, neo-romantic
Rustics (Mechanicals)	Lower brass, Bassoon	Bass (2) Bass-baritone, Baritone, Tenor (2)	Low, buffoons, peasants, satirical, recitative

The same coincidence of high voices, percussion instruments, and supernatural elements to be observed in The Turn of the Screw (see Chap. III) is also noticeable in A Midsummer Night's Dream. In addition to the

group division shown above, this can be demonstrated by the use of only one instrument. Oberon, King of the Fairies, is cast in the high range and unusual timbre of a counter-tenor. He and his magic spell are represented by the celesta. It is his action (and Puck's mistakes) which precipitates the confusion of the Lovers and the Rustics, and also their happy resolution which concludes the opera. In Peter Grimes the celesta was associated with death, in The Turn of the Screw with ghostly menace, and in A Midsummer Night's Dream with a potent spell.

The Instrumental Music

Britten separated the action in Peter Grimes by interludes depicting different moods of the sea. The "overtures" to each act of A Midsummer Night's Dream represent the wood at twilight, at night, and at dawn. As this is a work concerned with sleep and dreams,[14] the "overtures" can also be seen to indicate the processes of falling asleep, dreaming, and awakening. In keeping with the comic masque-like style of the plot, Britten composed each of the "overtures" in the form of ritornelli, which recur throughout the acts. Each ritornello serves as a connecting link between different scenes, which are not formally divided in the score.

The ritornello in Act I consists of slowly accelerating glissandi on the strings, based on the twelve notes of the chromatic scale. Start-

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[14] Britten wrote several works on this topic. See John Warrack's brochure for Benjamin Britten: A Midsummer Night's Dream (London OSA 1385), pp. 4-9.

ing with the low tones of the double basses, the higher strings are added gradually until the bright timbre of the plectra,[15] triangle, and glockenspiel announce the entrance of the Fairies.[16] While this ritornello opens and closes Act I and separates the scenes within the act, it is also used with the triangle and glockenspiel to accompany the Fairies' chorus and Tytania, their Queen (score, pp. 140-143). With the addition of percussion then, this string ritornello represents the mysterious power of both the wood and of the Fairy Kingdom.

The second act opens with four tranquil chords depicting sleep, the dream, and/or the wood at night. Once more the twelve chromatic tones are used, but this time in a vertical, rather than linear, manner.[17] Each chord is played by a different instrumental group: strings, brass, woodwind, and plectra and percussion. As in the first ritornello, this one also starts with a dark timbre at a low pitch rising to the high, ringing colour of the metallophones. The four chords comprising the ritornello are shown in Example 29 on page 83 (condensed from score, p. 157).

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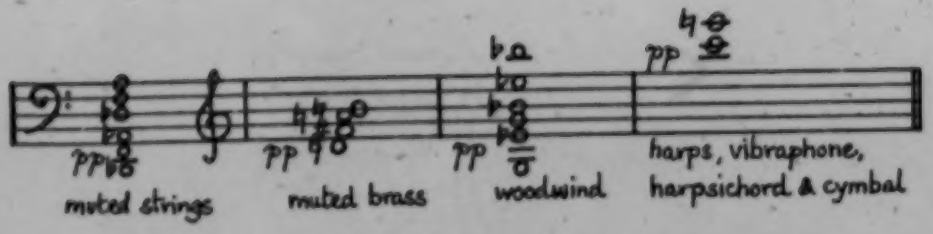
[15] The term "plectra" aptly describes the harps and harpsichord which, with the percussion, are associated with the Fairies. See Jan Morris Bach, "An Analysis of Britten's 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'" (D.M.A.thesis, University of Illinois, 1971), p. 42.

[16] Benjamin Britten, A Midsummer Night's Dream, Op. 64 (London: Hawkes and Son, 1960), pp. 1-5.

[17] Britten used the same chords to express sleep in Sonnet, the last song of Serenade, Op. 31 (1943). See Eric Roseberry, "A Note on the Four Chords in Act II of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'," Tempo 66-67 (Autumn/Winter, 1963):36-37.



Ex. 29. Ritornello in Act II, A Midsummer Night's Dream.

This example shows how the fourth chord expresses the somnolent languor of Oberon's magic spell. The chords of the ritornello are used as the theme for a set of variations, which follow the first statement. The fifth variation is interrupted by the entry of the Rustics to rehearse their play (score, p. 165). At the end of the second scene the ritornello occurs again, accompanying Tytania's spellbound melody to Bottom, "O how I love thee!" (score, p. 236). Three more variations follow as an instrumental transition to the third scene, in which Oberon and Puck observe the distress of the Lovers (score, pp. 237-242). After Puck has led each of them to different parts of the wood to prevent them from fighting, they fall asleep and he reverses the unfortunate effects of the spell. The Fairies enter and sing a chorus of blessing for the Lovers, to the accompaniment of seven more variations of the ritornello, as the conclusion to Act II. In all, there are sixteen variations of the chord theme which are used as prelude, interlude, and postlude to this act. Once again the ritornello is associated with the Fairies, more definitely than was its counterpart in the first act. This is shown by its occurrence with Tytania, Oberon, Puck and the

Fairies' closing chorus, and by the fact that it does not appear in connection with the other two groups of characters, the Rustics and the Lovers.

The introduction to Act III is a contrapuntal ritornello which recurs three times before the scene changes from the wood to Theseus' court. Since it is played by the strings alone and does not involve the percussion ensemble at all, it will not be described further.

A Quick March makes the transition from the wood to the Duke's court and suggests the journey of the Lovers and the Rustics to Athens. This march is the only other substantial instrumental section in the opera, apart from the three ritornelli. The timpani (doubled by the plectra of harps and pizzicato double-bass) provides a rhythmic ostinato based on the theme of the Rustics' play, Pyramus and Thisbe. Above the timpani and sustained beats of the gong, cumulative orchestration through forty-two bars produces a textural and dynamic climax as Theseus' palace appears (score, pp. 385-394). The two percussion instruments in this interlude are dramatically effective in anticipating a ceremonial and festive occasion.[18]

Later in the same act a lively Bergomask is danced by the Rustics at the end of their play. Originally a peasant dance of the late sixteenth century, Britten enhances its folk-like character with articulation from the side drum and the tambourine (score, pp. 460-466).

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[18] Compare this effect with the use of the Babylonian drum and metallophones in the march of the king's court in The Burning Fiery Furnace, written six years later (see below, p. 170).

Two shorter instrumental pieces demonstrate the impressive combination of percussion with one other instrument. The first is the miniature prologue and epilogue to the Rustics' play in Act III (score, pp. 413-414 and 459-460). The repetitive phrase played on the trumpet and timpani (with wooden sticks) conjures up images of children boastfully displaying their traditional instruments of drum and trumpet. The other example is the stage-music in Act II, which Bottom names so aptly "the tongs and bones"[19] (score, p. 227). Tytania has instructed her fairies to entertain him with some music, and they oblige with a jaunty tune which portrays delightfully their airy and mischievous natures. The tune is scored for two woodblocks, small cymbals, and two sopranino recorders. The high and sharp timbre resulting from the three instrumental types, together with their fast tempo, sets this section apart from the slower, melodious music surrounding it, played on the woodwinds, harps, and strings. The opening bars of the fairies' tune is shown in Example 30 on page 86 (score, p. 228).

After an aside from Bottom, the fairies play again. This time, however, the metre is changed from a Quick March $\frac{4}{4}$ to $\frac{6}{8}$, and the tune

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[19] Tongs and bones refer to very ancient folk instruments. They appear in Filippo Bonanni, Antique Musical Instruments and Their Players: 152 Plates from Bonanni's 18th Century "Gabinetto Armonico," new Introduction and captions by Frank Ll. Harrison and Joan Rimmer (New York: Dover, 1964), plate 96. Britten chose very appropriate instruments to match Shakespeare's words: the small cymbals for the tongs, and the woodblocks for the bones.

Ex. 30. "Tongs and Bones" Stage music, Act II.

resembles an old nursery rhyme "Boys and girls come out to play." The rest of the orchestra is added gradually as Bottom clumsily joins in and begins to dance (score, pp. 230-232). The dramatic contrast between the small agile fairies and the large ungainly workman with his ass' head is effectively depicted by the instrumental groups and musical style of this section.

Many of the set instrumental pieces in the opera accompany the voices, for instance, the Slow Marches in Acts I and III which announce the entry of Oberon and his attendants, and the Sarabande in the last act.

The Vocal Music

Unlike the chamber operas written before A Midsummer Night's Dream, Britten keeps the traditional operatic practice of alternating recitatives and arias, but without interrupting the course of the drama within each act. Thematic references and associative scoring link the action between the different groups of characters into a continuous unfolding of the Dream. There are vocal ensembles sung by the Fairies, the Lovers, and the Rustics, but no choruses involving all of them together, since each group is kept distinct from the others. Because of

the particular connection between the Fairies and the percussion, it is within this group that most of the interesting percussive effects are to be found.

Oberon's spell theme casts an atmosphere of eerie magic through the entire opera.[20] Its chromatic intervals generate Oberon's melody "Be it on Lion, or on Wolf, or Bull" (score, p. 42) which forms the basis of his later aria "I know a bank where the wild thyme blows" (score, pp. 75-80). The sweet, somewhat cloying timbre of the celesta becomes a recurring reminder of the spell's power as Oberon and Puck proceed to enchant Tytania, Lysander, and Demetrius during the first two acts. The last appearance of the spell theme on the celesta is speeded up as Oberon reverses the magic and awakes Tytania in Act III (score, pp. 324-325). The entry of the theme and Oberon's melody are shown in Example 31 on page 88 (score, p. 42).

The speaking role of Puck is associated with trumpet flourishes and light drum taps on the tamburo. The dry, yet penetrating colour of the drum is a perfect foil for his voice[21] and conveys his playful elfin nature. In Act II his tamburo is replaced by the xylophone for

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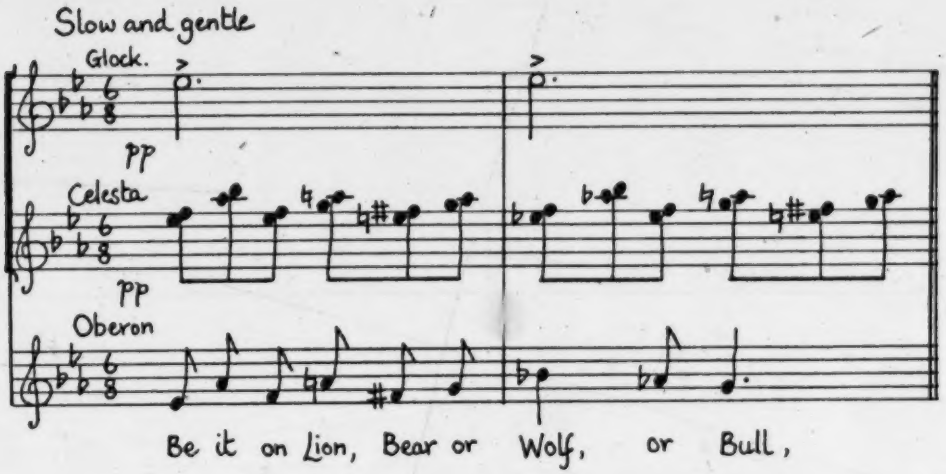
[20] This angular ostinato figure played on the celesta bears a strong resemblance to Quint's motive, on the same instrument, in The Turn of the Screw.

[21] Puck's part cannot be called Sprechstimme, since the level of his voice does not change but is notated in monotone.



Ex. 31. Oberon's spell theme on celesta. Act I.

several of his entrances and exits. This suggests that he too has become confused by the magic spell he administers. Oberon berates him for enchanting the wrong mortals, in a scene which displays the Fairies' associated instruments of plectra and percussion with great effect (score, pp. 288-291). Oberon's rage and Puck's agonised yells are punctuated by sharp strokes alternately on the cymbal, side drum, tenor drum, bass drum, and gong. The xylophone and timpani have rising and falling tremoli. Puck assures his master that it was all a mistake and is sent off to put matters right again to the accompaniment of trumpet, cymbal, and gong.

Tytania and her fairy attendants usually sing to the accompaniment of the metallophones. As befits the coloratura style of Tytania's role, her associated instrument is the high melodic glockenspiel. However, her graceful aria "Be kind and courteous to this

gentleman" is scored for plectra and woodwind instruments, with no percussion. Her retinue of four fairies are characterized by the glockenspiel and triangle, with the addition of the sharper wooden timbres of the xylophone and woodblocks. At the end of the first act these instruments are used in a carefully structured lullaby as Tytania falls asleep (score, pp. 144-153). Part of the lullaby is illustrated in Example 32 (score, p. 149).

Ex. 32. Fairies' lullaby for Tytania, Act I.

Although the metallophones and woodblocks occur mainly in conjunction with the Fairies, they are also used to highlight the text and action of other characters. The Rustics' play, when finally performed in front of Theseus and his court, turns into a miniature opera buffa, with Britten satirizing nineteenth-century operatic conventions just as Shakespeare's text mocked Elizabethan customs of his day. It is here in the "very tragical mirth" of Pyramus and Thisby that the instruments formerly associated with mercurial spirits make ironical

fun of the rough, untutored workmen and some of their portrayals. Mournful beats of the gong accompany Pyramus' (and later Thisby's) reference to Ninny's tomb (score, pp. 435 and 445). As Snout declaims his role as Wall in an off-key Sprechstimme, a small woodblock provides a sound picture of the chink through which the two lovers peep. However, the high tone-colour suggests that the chink is almost above their range of sight (score, pp. 425-426 and 436-437). Snug, who portrays the ferocious Lion, ingratiates himself to the ladies to the accompaniment of the triangle (score, pp. 439-441). The Moon is first represented by the shimmering tones of the vibraphone[22] and then by tremoli on the glockenspiel (score, pp. 442-444 and 449). After Pyramus has stabbed himself, he announces that he is dead and orders the Moon to leave. Starveling, the Moon-man, exits to a final flourish from the glockenspiel, shown below in Example 33 (score, p. 453).

Ex. 33. The Glockenspiel as the disappearing Moon, Act III.

[22] The vibraphone was first accepted into dance and jazz bands in the 1920s. Alban Berg used it in his opera Lulu (1934), but it was included in the classical orchestra only after World War II. Britten used it previously in his Spring Symphony (1949) and it has a prominent part in Death in Venice (see below).

The most ingenious use of the metallophones occurs at the end of the operetta, as the Rustics and Lovers take leave of Theseus and Hippolyta, and the Fairies creep in to give a protective blessing on the house. The sounds of midnight are first heard from a large bell tuned to G_1 -sharp. The twelve strokes of the clock are then played for thirty-four repetitions by various instruments of different timbres and with different tempi, pitches, dynamics, and durations (score, pp. 466-480). After the bell, six more metallophones are used for eighteen of the repetitions in addition to one from a non-metal percussion instrument. The instruments are: the glockenspiel, celesta (5 times each), vibraphone (3 times), cymbal, triangle (twice each), gong, and timpani (once each). The nocturnal sounds of this orchestra of small clocks create a peaceful mood after the hilarity of the Rustic's performance, and prepare the audience for the slow final chorus of the Fairies.

In this opera the dramatic uses of the percussion section have been mainly focused on the metal instruments. The drums are often used to express discord between the characters. The timpani, for instance, initiates the "jealous Oberon" theme in the first scene, and with side drum and bass drum emphasizes Oberon's argument with Tytania. The same instrument punctuates the anger of Demetrius and Helena's agitation while they are at cross-purposes in Act I, but it is noticeably absent during the tender exchanges between the other pair of lovers, Lysander and Hermia. The rising quarrel of all four Lovers, in the second act, is heightened by insistent <u>ostinati</u> on the timpani, followed by the

tenor drum, side drum, and tambourine (played like a drum, with sticks). These are only a few of the many examples that could be described of Britten's imaginative use of the membranophones. The emphasis in this work remains, however, with the colouristic and melodic features of the wooden and metal percussion instruments. Their function in providing thematic references and associative scoring is one of the most successful elements in this opera, and Britten continued to use the same techniques of percussion writing in the church parables and Death in Venice.

DEATH IN VENICE

Britten's approach to percussion writing in A Midsummer Night's Dream went through a period of rapid development during the creation of the church parables (see Chap. IV). In his last two operas for theatre performance, Owen Wingrave (1970)[23] and Death in Venice (1973), some of the rigorous forms of the parables were retained, but there was also a return to the warmer, more full-bodied harmonic and melodic style of Britten's earlier operatic works. The difficulty in approaching Death in Venice arises from its apparent simplicity. There are few singing roles of any substance, a lack of overtly dramatic events, and a spare musical texture; yet there are

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[23] Although this opera was commissioned by the B.B.C. for television, it has proved equally effective in subsequent performances in opera houses.

many complex layers of meaning in the interaction between characters, events, and music. "One feels oneself launched into new territory, musical and dramatic, with only a minimal map to consult."[24]

A formidable task is required from the singer who plays the part of Gustav von Aschenbach. He is required to be present on stage for practically the entire work, which lasts for two-and-a-half hours. In addition, all other characters and events are seen through his eyes. This is virtually a full-scale opera for one person. Even Tadzio, who is the only other protagonist, does not speak, let alone sing. In A Midsummer Night's Dream, Puck, second in importance to Oberon, was at least able to express his character through speech. The lack of substantial singing roles in Death in Venice leaves the characterization of the dramatis personae (of which there are many) mainly to instrumental resources. This distance between Aschenbach and the other roles produces an ethereal and other-worldly atmosphere more remote than the supernatural planes of either The Turn of the Screw or A Midsummer Night's Dream. In Death in Venice Britten created a dream more powerful and convincing than in any of the works that he wrote concerning dreams and sleep. This last opera is also the culmination of his symbolic use of percussion. More than in any other work, Britten here used percussion instruments to delineate not only different characters and transcendant elements, but also the psychological conflict which is the mainspring of the drama.

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[24] Donald Mitchell, "An Introduction to Death in Venice," p. 6.

Thomas Mann's novella, Der Tod in Venedig, deals with a familiar predicament of the artist--the pursuit of beauty without the corruption of excessive feeling. An eminent and aging writer, Gustav von Aschenbach, goes to Venice to rejuvenate his depleted inspiration. To his alarm he finds himself a victim of events and feelings that he cannot control. In his introspective and metaphysical deliberations, his environment and the people he meets become agents of the ancient Greek cults of Apollo and Dionysus, each trying to gain his allegiance. The Venice which he loves is distorted by the cholera epidemic which lies in wait to claim him, while his irresistible attraction to the Apollonian ideal of beauty in the boy Tadzio ensures his mental and emotional collapse as well.

The opera that Myfanwy Piper and Britten created from this story is in seventeen short scenes, divided into two acts. Although there is a long pause and an intermission at the end of the first act, the second act starts where the first left off, and scene vii continues across the division. Britten's musical thought is continuous and produces a rapid and uninterrupted kaleidoscopic setting of the drama. Tadzio, his family, and friends communicate only through the visual language of dance and athletics. Seven different characters confront Aschenbach at various times, each exerting a malevolent influence on him. These are the Traveller, Elderly Fop, Old Gondolier, Hotel Manager, Hotel Barber, Leader of the Strolling Players, and Dionysus. All seven roles are given to one baritone singer. This conveys exactly the one function which they all have in common: to guide

Aschenbach towards his fateful end. There are numerous other roles for tourists, children, and street-sellers, some of whom have small singing parts and some who dance.

The orchestral forces of this work are similar to those of A Midsummer Night's Dream, but in addition they include a huge array of twenty-five different percussion instruments. This independent, almost separate orchestra is made up as follows:

TABLE 6

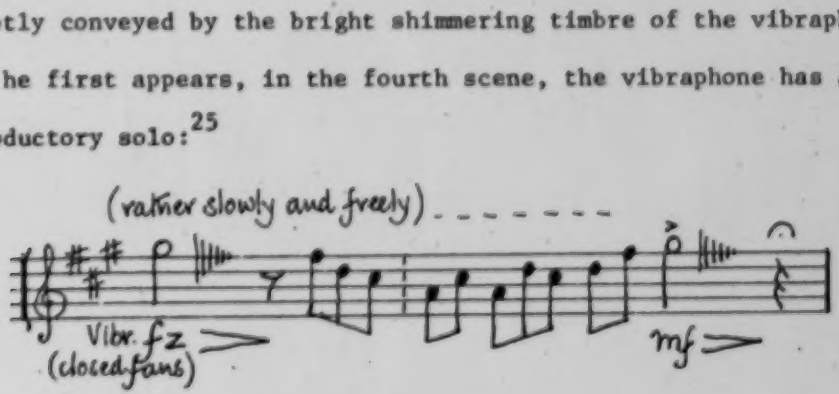
PERCUSSION SCORING IN DEATH IN VENICE

MELODIC	MEMBRANE	METAL
Vibraphone 2 Xylophones (1 small) Marimba 2 Glockenspiels Crotales Tubular Bells Timpani, Piano	2 Side drums 2 Tenor drums 2 Bass drums (1 large) 3 Tom-toms 3 Chinese drums small drum tuned drum (c)	2 Cymbals (pair) 2 suspended Cymbals 2 small Cymbals (pair) Triangle 2 tuned Gongs (D-sharp +G) 2 Tamtams (large+small) Bell-tree
VARIOUS UNPITCHED	Tambourine, Woodblocks, Whips (large+small) Wind-machine.	

This table shows eight melodic instruments, but the inclusion of varied sizes of drums, cymbals, gong, tamtams, and whips enabled Britten to use these too in quasi-pitched or melodic patterns. It is for this reason that this large ensemble has not been categorized into the conventional types of pitched and unpitched instruments, or solely by their construction material.

Partly because of the lack of instrumental interludes in this opera, it is no longer relevant to examine the use of percussion in the diverse milieu of instrumental and vocal musical sections, as is the case when discussing Peter Grimes, the chamber operas, and to a lesser extent, A Midsummer Night's Dream. In Death in Venice the percussion orchestra takes on a life of its own, set apart from the other orchestral instruments; it becomes an interpreter of the dramatic action as vital as the human voice. In effect the music and the drama become a single unified entity. The following discussion therefore highlights some of the most expressive examples to demonstrate the exceptional dramatic role fulfilled by the percussion.

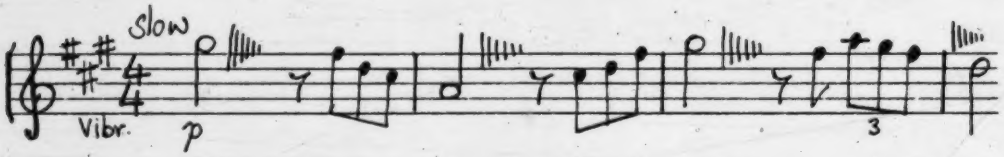
Since Tadzio neither sings nor speaks, his associated instrument takes on a special importance by indicating his presence and actions throughout the drama. His strange beauty and its pervasive influence is aptly conveyed by the bright shimmering timbre of the vibraphone. When he first appears, in the fourth scene, the vibraphone has a short introductory solo:[25]



Ex. 34. Vibraphone's entry, scene iv.

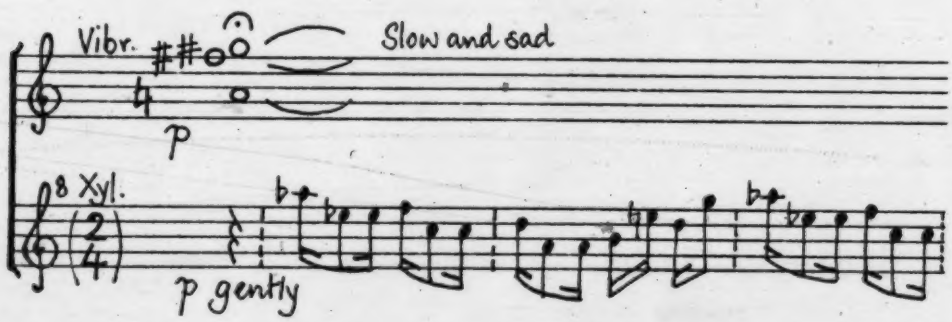
[25] Benjamin Britten, Death in Venice, Op. 88, Libretto by Myfanwy Piper after the story by Thomas Mann. Photocopy of composer's full score kindly loaned by G. Schirmer, Inc., New York, p. 180.

As Aschenbach notices the boy's etherical grace "A golden look, a timeless air," the vibraphone's phrase is extended into Tadzio's theme (score, p. 182):



Ex. 35. Tadzio's theme.

This theme retains its melodic shape and tonal area when Tadzio reappears alone. However, it is condensed and extended--sometimes on other melodic percussion instruments--whenever he is in company with his family or friends. An example of the condensed theme occurs in scene xiv, where Aschenbach observes the boys dancing on the empty beach (score, p. 633)



Ex. 36. Condensed theme with xylophone solo, Boys' dance, sc. xiv.

The three notes of Tadzio's theme shown above also demonstrate a technique which Britten developed in the church parables, in which notes of

the melodic line are combined vertically to produce harmonic accompaniment.

The music associated with Tadzio, his family, and friends has a sonority and style distinct from that associated with the other characters. The instruments used are percussion keyboards, including the piano, with the addition of other metallophones and occasionally drums. The timbre and repetitive structure of this scoring are unmistakably derived from the exotic Indonesian gamelan.[26] Compared with the Western musical style of thematic development and through-composition, gamelan music appears relatively static. A complex texture is created by cyclic melodies with heterophonic variations played by different instruments simultaneously. This is precisely what is heard in Tadzio's music. It is this sparkling density of sound which displays his remote beauty and aloof character. He is static, in that by the end of the opera he remains apparently unchanged, whereas Aschenbach, in contrast, goes through severe emotional and physical stress ending with his death. A clear example of the gamelan style is shown in scene vii, as Tadzio climbs on top of a human pyramid made by his friends (see Example 37 on page 99) (score, p. 329).

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[26] The vibraphone, xylophone, and marimba correspond to the Balinese gender, bronze keyboards over tube resonators; the glockenspiel evokes the gangsa or saron, a type of trough-xylophone, and the tuned gongs are reminiscent of the reyong or bonang, which are sets of bronze knobbed gongs. The crotales, cymbals, and bells are all similar to other metallophones of Java and Bali. See William P. Malm, Music Cultures of the Pacific, The Near East, and Asia, 2nd ed., Prentice Hall History of Music Series, H. Wiley Hitchcock, ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1977), pp. 34-49. For references to Britten's other uses of the gamelan style, see Chap. IV.

Ex. 37. Gamelan Music, sc. vii.

The melodic percussion indicate Tadzio's every action, for instance, when he smiles to his mother's friends (vibraphone and glockenspiel, score, pp. 238-9), and when he starts ordering the boys around on the beach in scene v (see Example 38 on page 100) (score, p. 223).

Tadzio's music is sometimes used to show Aschenbach's reactions towards Tadzio and his family. In scene ix, Aschenbach had heard rumours of the plague in the city, and he begins to follow the Polish family through the streets. He fears that they too will learn of the

Ex. 38. Increased texture conveys Tadzio's action, sc. v.

sickness and leave Venice. His anxiety is effectively shown in Example 39 on page 101 (score, p. 464).

It will be noted from this example that the accelerating rhythm includes the unmeasured tremoli derived from Japanese drumming, another technique which Britten had used in the church parables and the War Requiem.[27]

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[27] The reverse effect, of tremoli decreasing in speed, is shown in Tadzio's theme, Example 35 above.

Ex. 39. Tremoli indicate Aschenbach's anxiety, sc. ix.

The climax of melodic percussion writing occurs in the final scene of the opera. Tadzio is having a game, which turns into a fight, with his friend Jaschiu. Aschenbach, already stricken with cholera, watches helplessly from his chair. As if to symbolize the relationship that they never had, the percussion here portrays the distress of both Aschenbach and Tadzio. The scene commences with the xylophone (see Example 36 above), and the other melodic percussion instruments are added

gradually. The texture thickens with the addition of brass, woodwind, and harp, and a long crescendo and accelerando increase the tension through forty-one bars (score, pp. 708-715). Finally, Jaschiu forces Tadzio's face into the sand, but as Aschenbach attempts to help the boy, Jaschiu lets him go and runs away. This moment of defeat, physical for Tadzio, emotional for Aschenbach, is shown in Example 40 (score, p. 715).

Ex. 40. Melodic percussion, climax of the fight, sc. xvii.

The drums are combined only rarely with Tadzio's gamelan music. While the glittering tone-colours of the keyboard percussion convey Tadzio's radiant other-worldliness (and the Apollonian side of Aschenbach's perception), the sombre membranophones represent the treacherous (and Dionysian) aspects of the drama. This is demonstrated in the first scene, where Aschenbach meets the Traveller in a Munich cemetery. Aschenbach does not wish to acknowledge the man, who describes the fetid sensuality of a tropical forest and urges the writer to travel south. Aschenbach feels an inexplicable desire, a hint of the Dionysian passion which will eventually overcome him. In the following example, Britten uses two sets of three drums, each set approximating pitches of the melodic timpani (score, p. 37).[28]

Ex. 41. Quasi-melodic drums, the Traveller, sc.i.

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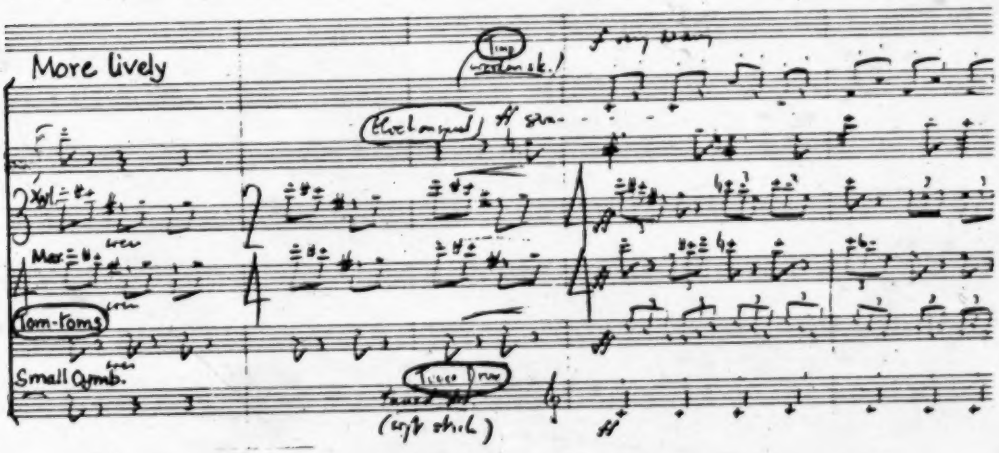
[28] The side drum, tenor drum, and bass drum play the high, middle, and low notes respectively on one staff; the three tom-toms do the same on the other staff.

After Aschenbach arrives in Venice, he watches the children playing on the beach, and the gamelan music is heard for the first time. As the game becomes more animated, the timpani, tom-toms, and tuned drum are added to the keyboard percussion. Each type of drum now has its own complementary rhythm. The tom-toms no longer imitate the timpani line, but have independent triplets, once again in a quasi-melodic shape. The presence of the drums in the gamelan music suggest the irrevocable course of events that result from Aschenbach's decision (a few bars later) to stay (Example 42, score, p. 207).



Ex. 42. Quasi-melodic drums with gamelan music, sc.v.

The association of the drums with Dionysian excess is confirmed in scene xiii when Aschenbach dreams of the "stranger god" superceding his life-long ideal of Apollo. In the first act, The Games of Apollo (scene vii) include a pentathlon where the boys compete and Tadzio is the victor. Although the drums are used occasionally in the games (and the wind-machine for the wrestling), the

dominant instruments are the keyboard percussion and metallophones. In The Dream, however, the emphasis is entirely on the drums, as Dionysus and his followers drive Apollo away with their orgiastic ritual. The rhythm and pitch of the timpani are again imitated by the other drums. A large bass drum is added with cymbal and tamtam, and all these instruments contribute to a loud and ferocious orchestral tutti. The percussion ensemble and chorus are shown below (score, p. 624):

Ex. 43. Dionysian drums, sc. xiii.

Shortly afterwards Aschenbach awakes and acknowledges the meaning of the dream: "It is all true, I can fall no further ... let the gods do what they will with me." Reason, discipline, and objectivity no longer govern his life; he is at the mercy of his feelings and accepts the consequences although he knows them to be disastrous.

There are other occasions when the drums are linked with Dionysus and Aschenbach's fate. In scene iii, he reflects on his ominous encounter with the surly Gondolier, accompanied by the bass drum, followed by the side drum and tenor drum (score, pp. 128-140). In the second act at The Travel Bureau, the Englishman tells him of the growing threat of the plague. The timpani underlines his sinister story with rising tremoli, additive rhythm, and a gradual crescendo (score, pp. 587-596). A particularly ironical example is at the end of Act I, after Tadzio is honoured as the winner of the pentathlon. Aschenbach is inspired by the victory "The power of beauty sets me free," and sings a hymn to Apollo. Slow beats on the timpani, side, tenor, and bass drums, however, indicate that the writer's excitable state is leading him on the downward path (score, pp. 387-400).

Percussion instruments also create some memorable sound images of lighter mood. A realistic impression of the boat's engines is given by the drums' ostinati in scene ii as Aschenbach travels to Venice. Example 44 shows the timpani played with wire brushes and the side, tenor, and bass drums played with scrubbing brushes ("ordinary domestic type")!

Ex. 44. Drums with brushes imitate boat's engine, sc. ii.

The tambourine and whips are used with drums in a rhythmical accompaniment to the Strolling Players in Act II.[29] The hotel management provides some entertainment for their guests hoping to deter them from thoughts of the plague. The Players display a somewhat

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[29] This is another example of a "play within a play" which Britten often included in his stage works.

macabre humour, however, and mock their audience in a laughing song. The syncopation of the voices and percussion is infectious, and all join in the laughter except Aschenbach and Tadzio. Part of the syncopated rhythm is illustrated in the following example, which includes the use of the large and small whip (score, p. 559).

Ex. 45. Laughing song, percussive and vocal syncopation, sc.x.

Two metallophones convey another scenic image in the only overture in the opera. The Overture: Venice sets the scene for the tourists' arrival in the city. A rippling barcarolle from the strings is alternated with a Gabrieli-style phrase by the brass, and a gong and

bell. The two percussion instruments evoke the timbre of Venetian church bells (score, pp. 96-101). They are heard again in the second act, when the Polish family and Aschenbach attend a service in St. Mark's Basilica.[30]

The treatment of the percussion ensemble in Death in Venice is ideally suited to the internal psychological drama with which the work is concerned. The opera is the culmination of over three decades of operatic composition, in which the percussion played an increasingly prominent part in dramatic characterization. From its more subdued use in Peter Grimes, Britten gradually moved the percussion into a central role in depicting qualities of character and emotional states of mind.

With Peter Grimes, Death in Venice forms the frame of Britten's operatic output. Between these tragedies he produced thirteen other operas of varied style and structure. Comedy is restricted to one chamber opera (Albert Herring), A Midsummer Night's Dream, and divertissements within the dramas. In the larger works Britten tended to prefer serious or tragic themes. An apt distinction between comedy and tragedy is given by Peter Garvie, in his article on the character of Peter Grimes. In comedy, the drama ends with the people changed,

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[30] Britten visited Venice several times and was familiar with the resonant acoustical properties of Venetian churches. The metrical non-alignment in the church parables and Death in Venice is directly attributable to this influence. See Mitchell, Pictures, plate 331.

but not the world; tragedy ends with the world changed, but not the people.[31] This is particularly appropriate in the case of Britten's operas. In A Midsummer Night's Dream, the protagonists, Oberon, Tytania, Bottom, and the Lovers, are all changed by the end of the work. In Peter Grimes and Death in Venice, neither Grimes nor Aschenbach are able to adjust to the changing events around them. They both evade direct confrontation, cannot communicate, and suffer consequent isolation and eventual death. Garvie's definition is also relevant to the chief characters of two of the chamber operas, The Rape of Lucretia and The Turn of the Screw, to be discussed in the following chapter.

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[31] Peter Garvie, "Plausible Darkness: Peter Grimes after a Quarter of a Century," Tempo 100 (Spring, 1972):9-14.

CHAPTER III

PERCUSSION IN THREE CHAMBER OPERAS

The chamber operas offer valuable insight into Britten's evolving use of percussion in dramatic contexts. The smaller vocal and instrumental forces involved allow a transparent texture in which the sonorities and techniques of different instruments can be heard effectively through the overall musical fabric.

The period of The Rape of Lucretia (1946), Albert Herring (1947), and The Turn of the Screw (1954) was extraordinarily fertile for Britten. He completed, among other works, two full-scale operas (Billy Budd and Gloriana), the first three Canticles, two song cycles (A Charm of Lullabies and Winter Words), two more chamber operas (The Beggar's Opera and The Little Sweep), The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra, Saint Nicolas, and the Spring Symphony. Britten intended the chamber operas to provide a serious alternative to expensive metropolitan productions of full-scale operas. The smaller works could be rehearsed and performed more economically, and, as the repertoire of a small touring company (The English Opera Group, since 1975 the English Music Theatre), they could also introduce English opera to provincial audiences in Britain and overseas. With these goals in mind, Britten once again broke new ground in the English operatic tradition. His pioneering example has since been followed by several other composers of chamber operas in England and the rest of Europe. Britten reduced the number of instrumental musicians required from the thirty to forty

in his full-scale operas to thirteen in each of the chamber operas under discussion. The scoring is given in Table 7 below.

TABLE 7

SCORING IN THREE CHAMBER OPERAS

The Rape of Lucretia	Albert Herring	The Turn of the Screw
Flute/Piccolo/ Alto Flute Oboe/Cor Anglais, Clarinet/Bass Clarinet Bassoon, Horn, Harp, String Quartet, Double Bass, Piano (Conductor for Recitatives), Percussion (1)	Flute/Piccolo/ Alto Flute Oboe, Clarinet/Bass Clarinet Bassoon, Horn, Harp, String Quartet, Double Bass, Piano (Conductor for Recitatives), Percussion (1)	Flute/Piccolo/ Alto Flute Oboe/Cor Anglais, Clarinet/Bass Clarinet Bassoon, Horn, Harp, String Quartet, Double Bass, Piano (Conductor for Recitatives), Percussion (1)

The percussion ensemble consists of seven basic instruments. In addition, there are certain percussion instruments which are not common to all three works. The tambourine and the whip occur in The Rape of Lucretia and Albert Herring. The bells, glockenspiel, and woodblock occur in Albert Herring and in The Turn of the Screw, while the castanets are used only in Albert Herring (which also contains special effects such as a bicycle bell, a shop bell, a bouncing ball, and others). The tom-tom and celesta are heard only in The Turn of the Screw. The percussion scoring is shown on the following page in Table 8.

There is an increasing number of metallophones (particularly the pitched instruments) in proportion to membranophones in each succeeding opera. In The Rape of Lucretia, the drums and tambourine outnumber the metal instruments by 5:3, but in The Turn of the Screw, the metal instru-

TABLE 8

PERCUSSION SCORING IN THREE CHAMBER OPERAS

	The Rape of Lucretia	Albert Herring	The Turn of the Screw
Basic Group	Timpani, Side drum, Tenor drum, Bass drum, Triangle, Cymbal, Gong	Timpani, Side drum Tenor drum, Bass drum, Triangle, Cymbal, Gong	Timpani, Side drum, Tenor drum, Bass drum,Triangle, Cymbal, Gong
Additional Percussion	Tambourine, Whip	Tambourine, Whip, Bells, Glockenspiel, Woodblock; Castanets	Bells, Glockenspiel, Woodblock, Tom-tom, Celesta
Special Effects		Bicycle bell, Shop bell, bouncing Ball, Door knock, Table rap	

ments outnumber the drums by 6:5 and in Albert Herring by 7:5 if the special effects are included. This increase in the use of metallophones has been observed in the full-scale operas and is also to be seen in the church parables (see Chap. IV). It is significant that the chamber opera containing the greatest number of metallophones deals with the supernatural as its main theme.

The single percussion player plays nine different instruments in the first chamber opera, thirteen in the second (compared with Peter Grimes, where two players were required for the same number of instruments), and eleven in the third. The celesta in The Turn of the Screw is played by the pianist, not the percussionist. Because of this restriction to one player, Britten organized his percussion writing in a linear manner, allowing the instruments to be played and heard in alternation

rather than in tutti percussive effects. However, several percussion solos feature three or more instruments at the same time. This procedure is shown in the following examples of drum music, which also demonstrate the facility of the drums to evoke different moods in contrasting dramatic situations.

The first example, from The Rape of Lucretia, uses bass drum, tenor drum, side drum, and cymbal. The asymmetrical rhythm of the percussion aptly conveys Tarquinius' cautious footsteps as he approaches the sleeping Lucretia, sometimes hurried, sometimes pausing to make sure he is not observed (score, pp. 183-184). This is one of very few instances in the chamber operas where the percussion is heard independently from the rest of the orchestra.

Ex. 46. The Rape of Lucretia: Percussion solo with four instruments. Tarquinius approaches the sleeping Lucretia. Act II, sc. i.

In Albert Herring, the same combination of drums gives an onomatopoeic impression of the schoolchildren's ball-bouncing game in the following scene. This occurs in the Act I Interlude that sets the rhythm and playful mood for the scene at Mrs. Herring's greengrocery

store. The drums' short ostinato pattern reflects the customary delight that children have in repetitive games (score, pp. 127-139).

Ex. 47. Albert Herring: Percussion solo with three instruments. Act I, Interlude.

The last example, from The Turn of the Screw, uses the timpani, tenor drum, tom-tom, and cymbal. After the Prologue in Act I, the timpani and tenor drum play an ostinato which dominates the orchestral statement of the Theme and the first scene. The Governess is travelling by coach to the country house at Bly, where she is to look after the children, Flora and Miles. The movement of the coach as well as the Governess' anxious thoughts are both indicated in the drums' subdued but relentless pattern. This is interrupted as she asks herself "Oh why did I come?" As she resolves to continue the task, and comes to the end of her journey, the tom-tom is introduced for the first and only time in the opera, and the cymbal adds two final notes of expectancy (see Example 48 on page 116, score, p. 13).

Ex. 48. The Turn of the Screw: Percussion solo with four instruments. Act I, scene i, The Journey.

THE INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC

The instrumental (as distinct from the vocal) sections in each chamber opera perform the same functions as those in the full-scale operas. Introductions and interludes set the mood for the following scenes, and the interludes occasionally make dramatic comment on the preceding scenes. In each opera, however, they are treated differently. The Rape of Lucretia has two acts and an epilogue. The interludes in this opera, unlike those in Peter Grimes and in most of Britten's other operas are not strictly instrumental. They include the voices of the Male and Female Chorus, two characters who stand outside the time and action of the drama but comment on it throughout the work. Albert Herring has three acts with no interlude in the last act. The interludes and the introductions to Acts II and III are purely instrumental, but the introduction to the first act includes the voices of Florence and of Lady Billows offstage. The Turn of the Screw has a prologue and two acts, organized in the controlled structure of a twelve-note theme and fifteen variations. There are eight short scenes in each act, each linked with an instrumental variation that sets the mood

and key of the scene. Only one of the variations includes a voice--that of the ghost, Peter Quint. This opera also contains the only example in the three works of an interlude without percussion--Variation II.

Additional instruments beyond the basic group are reserved for enhancing the vocal characterization and the dramatic action within the scenes. In The Turn of the Screw, where every variation is closely related to its following scene, three of the five additional instruments (bells, glockenspiel, and celesta) are heard in the interludes. Once again, it is significant that these exceptions to the rule are pitched metallophones. Each time they occur (in Variations VII, VIII, IX and XI) they represent the sinister power of the supernatural.

The Rape of Lucretia

In the introduction to the first scene, the Male Chorus and the Female Chorus give a brief historical background in recitative, interspersed by sustained chords from the orchestra. As the Male Chorus describes the terrible deeds of Tarquinius Superbus and his wife that enabled them to assume the throne of Rome, the atmosphere of horror and dread is conveyed by tremoli from the side drum and timpani at the words "And now rule Rome by force and govern by sheer terror." The phrase is given more impact by the drums' crescendo and by the use of side-drum sticks on the timpani. The Female Chorus then describes the unpopular war between Romans and Greeks, led by Prince Tarquinius Sextus. "So here the grumbling Romans march from Rome. To fight the

Greeks who also march from home" is accompanied by double-bass, bassoon, and timpani chords in thirds in strict march rhythm.

The gong and suspended cymbal are added to the closing hymn of the introduction, sung by the two Choruses. The hymn occurs again at the end of the introduction to Act II and at the conclusion of the Epilogue, each time with the gong but without the cymbal. This is another example of metal instruments chosen to illustrate a spiritual or otherworldly aspect.

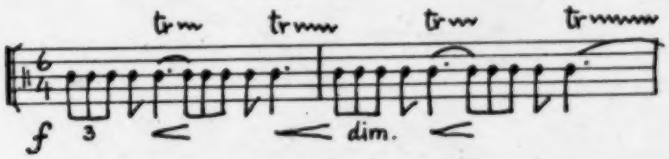
Junius, one of the Roman generals, dares Tarquinius to test Lucretia's chastity, and the interlude before scene II describes the Prince's furious ride to Lucretia's house in Rome. The horse's gallop is conveyed by alternating metres of $\frac{1}{4}$ and $\frac{3}{8}$, and by varied rhythmic and tonal patterns played on the bass drum and side drum. The tonal contrast between the high and low drum, together with the preparatory notes before the strong beats (flam, drag, and ruff) and the changing metre combine to present a vivid sound picture of the horse and rider. The drum patterns in this interlude, which occur several times, are shown in Example 49 on page 119 (score, pp. 71-86).

As they reach the banks of the Tiber, the Male Chorus (acting as Tarquinius' moral guardian) urges the Prince not to attempt to cross the river. But he plunges in and swims to the other side. The introduction of suspended cymbal, played with soft sticks, gives an uncanny impression of the impetuous Prince and his lathered horse entering the water and swimming across the river (score, pp. 87-89). This interlude contains some of the opera's most memorable imagery, in which the percus-

Ex. 49. The Rape of Lucretia: Drum rhythms of Tarquinius' Ride, Act I, Interlude.

sion writing is a prime factor.

The introduction to the first scene in Act II draws a larger parallel to the violent act about to be perpetrated on Lucretia. The Choruses describe the growing discontent of the Romans suffering under cruel Etruscan rulers. An increasing sense of violence is produced from the text with an insistent rhythm recurring in the woodwinds, harp, and percussion:

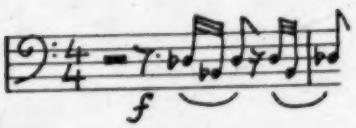


The percussion instrument assigned to this motive is mainly the side drum, but other instruments take it over occasionally to highlight particular phrases in the text. For example, "...the proud Romans sweat as they toiled in mountain quarry" is accompanied by the motive on the

bass drum,with side-drum sticks for heavier articulation. The triangle plays the motive to illustrate "delicate silver and tapestries" (score, pp. 163-164). As offstage voices sing with mounting anger "Down with the Etruscans" and "Rome's for the Romans," ominous timpani tremoli replace the rhythmical motive. The hymn sung by the Choruses, accompanied once more by the gong, leads into the opening of scene i and the gentle music for Lucretia's sleep.

The second interlude draws a discreet veil over Tarquinius' assault of Lucretia, and also provides the change of scene for her death. The Choruses sing a strophic hymn with instrumental accompaniment. In this interlude the role of percussion is the more conventional one of harmonic support from the timpani.

The Passacaglia in the last scene presents a fatalistic conclusion to the preceding events of the drama. The final entries of the ground take the major-third motive and extend it to a question and answer: "Is this it all?" "It is all!" But the Epilogue continues the question, as the Female Chorus asks, "Is all this suffering and pain, is this in vain?" Her commentary is based on the same major-third motive echoed by the harp. The timpani emphasizes her final cry "Is this all loss? Are we lost?" by repeating the question-motive as a minor third:



(score, p. 319). As the Male Chorus answers her with his Christian message of hope: "For us did he live..." the timpani plays the answer-motive, returning

to the major third: (score, p. 321).

This example from the Epilogue shows the way in which melodic percussion can take over a motive associated with the vocal text, become identified with the text, and then lend the motive greater dramatic significance in conjunction with different words.

Albert Herring

Albert Herring was written as a comedic foil to The Rape of Lucretia. The opera also complements Peter Grimes in that it deals with a similar situation of the "odd man out" in a small community. Whereas Grimes was ostracized and eventually destroyed for being too different from his neighbours, Albert has to break out of his obedience to convention in order to develop as a mature person. Albert Herring is the only one of the three chamber operas in three acts. Its ten main roles and duration of two hours and twenty minutes make it almost comparable to the full-scale operas of A Midsummer Night's Dream or Death in Venice, except for the smaller orchestral and vocal requirements.

The curtain rises on scene i as soon as the music commences. However, as Florence bustles about tidying and dusting, receiving Lady Billows' offstage orders with exasperation, the orchestra sets the scene and indicates Lady Billows' bombastic character of moral rectitude. Martial strokes from the side drum hint at her upright and inflexible

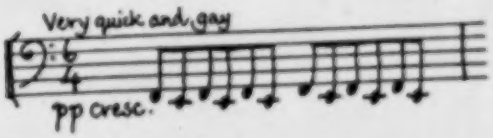
principles. Tremoli played on the bass drum, with side drum sticks for clearer articulation, accompany her directives to Florence (score, pp. 4 and 10). Her character is further delineated by timpani and cymbal in the Heavy March which announces her entrance for the committee meeting (score, pp. 30-34). This introduction and march give a clear example of percussion instruments used for associative scoring. It is unusual in that several instruments, instead of one, depict a single character. Throughout the opera bass drum, timpani, and cymbal continue to be associated, though not exclusively, with Lady Billows.

Like the interlude in Act II and the introductions to the second and third acts, the interlude before the second scene of Act I is strictly instrumental. The three drums which imitate the bouncing ball are replaced by a real ball as the scene opens. The rhythm of the ball's bounce is carefully notated in the score.

The short introduction in Act II is a festive preparation for the May Day celebration in the vicarage garden. Unmeasured fanfares played by the horn lead into a quick movement for winds and strings with continuous tremoli on the suspended cymbal. The monocolour of this metal instrument contrasts well with that of the drums in the previous interlude.

The second interlude starts before the curtain falls on the first scene. The assembled company sit down to eat amid a general hubbub of conversation. Tempo indications refer only to the orchestra, which announces a fugal interlude as the curtain falls. The cymbal is featured again as the sole percussion instrument until the timpani takes

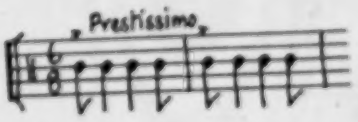
over with a pedal figure based on the fugal theme (score, pp. 335-337):



Ex. 50. Albert Herring: Timpani in Interlude, Act II.

The gong and cymbal appear briefly before the contrapuntal texture runs into the lyrical night music of scene ii. This is the most substantial interlude of the whole opera.[1]

The last act is introduced by a syncopated ostinato played by the side drum. The woodwind then the strings take up the rhythm in another fast instrumental movement which indicates the frantic search for Albert. The side drum's ostinato:



continues throughout the introduction and extends into the following scene. It recurs each time a different character enters with news of the search. In this way the side drum increases the mood of anxious excitement which culminates in the magnificent Threnody for Albert's presumed demise. The Threnody, a parody of nineteenth-century Anglican anthems, serves in place of a third interlude to divide the act between the search for Albert and his reappearance.

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[1] This interlude makes an interesting comparison with the lively introduction to Act II in The Rape of Lucretia which leads into the slow night music of Lucretia's sleep--at a similar stage in the drama. Night music with the same combination of alto flute and bass clarinet also occurs in The Turn of the Screw, Act II, Variation XI, and scene iv.

The Turn of the Screw

The Turn of the Screw is a setting of Myfanwy Piper's libretto based on the ghost story by Henry James. Some commentators consider it Britten's finest operatic achievement.[2] Along with influences from Wagner and Schoenberg, Britten demonstrated an aspect of Mahler's art not immediately apparent to the casual listener:

> Music which hints at emotional subtleties and undertones which, before and after Freud, make their effect mainly at subconscious level. James' complacent English country house, undermined by indefinable (and therefore unassailable) powers of evil, demanded for its musical treatment all the ambiguities, of innocence touched with worldly wisdom, of terror mounting below high spirits, that are of the essence of Mahler's art.[3]

The theme which forms the basis for the fifteen variations and sixteen scenes is a twelve-tone set, used tonally rather than serially. "Its presence, like that of the ghosts, haunts the entire work."[4] Since the melodic percussion is sometimes used thematically, the basic set is shown in Example 51 on page 125for reference.

There are four variation interludes with significant percussion writing in Act I and five in Act II. Since the variations are so closely linked with each scene, the music heard in a variation frequently

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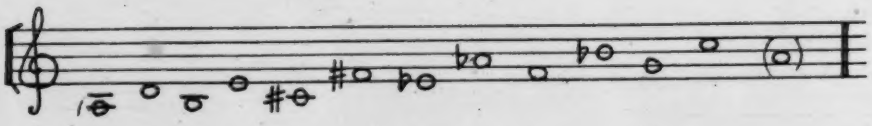
[2] See Hans Keller, Introduction to The Operas of Benjamin Britten, ed. David Herbert (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1979), pp. xxv and xxvii.

[3] Evans, The Music of Benjamin Britten, p. 203.

[4] Deavel, "A Study of Two Operas by Benjamin Britten", p. 71. An excellent description of the tonal organization of this opera is found in this work, in Evans' The Music of Benjamin Britten and in Erwin Stein's article "The Turn of the Screw and its Musical Idiom," Tempo, No. 34 (Winter 1954-5), pp. 6-14.



Ex. 51. Twelve-tone set of The Turn of the Screw.

continues into the following scene for which it has a preparatory function. The ostinato by timpani and tenor drum in the Theme and throughout scene i (already mentioned, see above p. 115) is a clear example.

Variation III is a condensed musical picture in advance of scene iv The Tower. Sustained chords in the strings indicate the quiet summer evening, with the flute representing a night bird. The string chords change to tremolo as a soft roll on the timpani, played with fingers instead of sticks, gives an ominous forewarning that the night is less idyllic than it seems. This music is repeated ironically in the following scene when the Governess seems to have overcome her first misgivings. At the words "Those fluttering fears..." the timpani roll resumes. Its warning is made clear a few minutes later when the ghost, Peter Quint, makes his first appearance. The Governess' agitated speculation as to his identity is followed by Variation IV, a quick march. This march serves as a prelude to the children's singing game, "Tom, Tom, the Piper's son" in scene v. It is comparable to the first interlude in Albert Herring, prior to the children's ball game, which used the same combination of bass drum, tenor drum, and side drum. The march in The Turn of the Screw differs, however, in rhythm and mood.

Here is an example of "terror mounting below high spirits" as the heaviness and syncopation of the rhythmic pattern suggest something odd and literally out of place. Part of the drum rhythm is shown below (score, p. 57):

Ex. 52. The Turn of the Screw: Syncopated rhythm for three drums, Variation IV.

This music too continues into the following scene, with the timpani replacing the tenor and bass drums.[5]

Dramatic tension rises towards the end of Act I, the influence of the two ghosts becoming more powerful over the adults as well as the children. Variation VII prepares for scene viii At Night, where the voices of Quint and Miss Jessel are heard for the first time, spell-binding the children. By this time, with previous appearances of the ghosts, associative scoring of two metallophones has become established for the supernatural apparitions. The distinctive, ethereal tone of the

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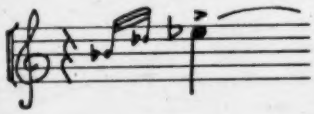
[5] In his Percussion Instruments and their History, Blades states that the timpani is additional to the bass drum, tenor drum, and side drum in Variation IV (see p. 421-422). The author of the present study found no timpani in the score during the variation. It is possible that Blades had access to a revised score or percussionist's part which differs from the published full score.

celesta represents Quint, while the enigmatic gong (with an F-sharp on the double bass) heralds Miss Jessel. Both these instruments are featured throughout this variation, the celesta part based on Quint's motive:



Ex. 53. The Turn of the Screw: Quint's motive on celesta.

In the final scene of Act I, both Quint's vocal line and the celesta part make elaborate use of the minor third and major second intervals contained in this motive.

Act II opens with the ghosts at the height of their power. They have won the children over to their side and sworn them to secrecy. The introductory Variation VIII consists of consecutive cadenzas on each of the twelve instruments, interpolated with muted chords in which the presence of the ghosts is constantly implied by the gong and celesta. The cadenzas all begin on a different note of the basic set, although not in their original order. The last cadenza is given to the timpani, which adds the final note (B) of the theme and transposes its first four notes to B-E-C-sharp-F-sharp (score, p. 171). This leads into scene i Colloquy and Soliloquy, where the ghosts meet in limbo and celebrate their macabre intentions (see Example 54 on page 128).

As if to symbolize the ascendance of supernatural forces, Variation IX and scene ii The Bells are dominated by these metal percus-

Ex. 54. The Turn of the Screw: Timpani cadenza in Variation VIII.

sion instruments. Twelve bells are given a permutation of the theme (in F-sharp) which continues into scene ii. The children are walking to church singing their own version of the Benedicite with very unholy words. There is non-alignment between the strictly metrical bells and the free chanting of the children which enhances the sinister atmosphere

From the beginning of Variation IX to near the end of Act II, scene ii, there are twenty-seven pages of bell music (score, pp. 188-215). It is this kind of emphasis that prompted James Blades to describe this work "a pearl among percussion scores":

> In The Turn of the Screw the writing for the tubular bells is such that it would be difficult to find a work where the scoring for orchestral chimes has been more fully explored. With the use of such effects as grace-notes, a three-note clash,...the use of the damping mechanism to clarify rapid passages, and the unique employment of glissandi (played with the handle of the bell hammer), Britten brings the belfry to the opera house.[6]

The version of the theme played by the bells in the variation is given in Example 55 on page 129(score, pp. 188-190).

Variation XI offers a glimpse in advance of scene iv The Bedroom. Britten's favourite instruments for night-music, the alto flute

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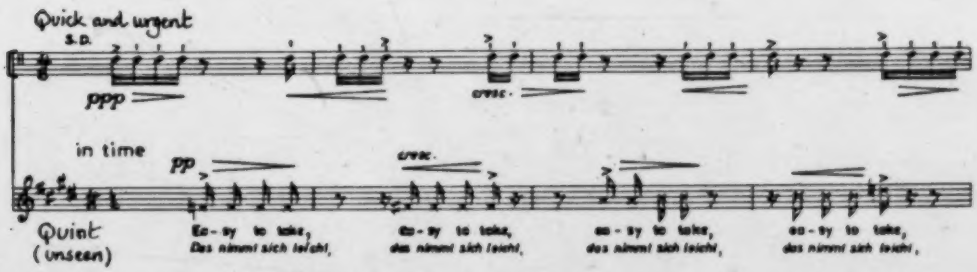
[6] Ibid.

Ex. 55. The Turn of the Screw: Permutation of the theme by tubular bells, Variation IX.

and bass clarinet, play a canon which is twice interrupted by the glockenspiel sounding Quint's motive as a chord. This is the only time in the opera that an instrument other than the celesta plays Quint's motive, although it appears occasionally in the vocal line. The glockenspiel's chord is heard in the following scene each time Quint's voice interrupts the conversation between Miles and the Governess. Since the celesta accompanies each of Quint's appearances to the Governess, the glockenspiel (with a similar timbre) may represent his unseen influence upon the boy's troubled mind.

The next variation, the prelude to scene v Quint, is the only one in the opera to include a voice. To a background of scurrying pizzicati in the strings, Quint (seen only in silhouette) speculates about the contents of the Governess' letter. His frantic curiosity is shown by reiterated sixteenth-note phrases in Sprechstimme: "What has she written?" and "Easy to take" as he sees the letter on the desk. The phrases are preceded each time by the same rhythm played with a brush on the side drum. Quint's rising excitement is shown in the example below (score, p. 251).



Ex. 56. The Turn of the Screw: Side drum mimicking Quint's Sprechstimme, Variation XII.

Although it is played and "sung" in strict tempo, the four-note phrase heightens the effect of nervous anxiety by metrical displacement.

The dramatic climax of the finale is anticipated in Variation XV. A one-bar crescendo of tutti tremoli chords from pianississimo to fortississimo produces an expectation of ultimate horror.[7] The twelve-note theme is contained simultaneously in the chords, which are interrupted

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[7] At the opening of Children's Crusade, written fifteen years later, a similar expectation is produced by the same means.

by two recitatives. These are played first on the highest instrument, the piccolo, then on the lowest, the timpani. Three aspects of this variation create extreme dramatic contrast: the change in texture between tutti scoring and solos by two instruments, and between chords followed by recitative; the spatial contrast between all the instruments, then the highest, then the lowest; and, the varied timbre from the full orchestra followed by piccolo then timpani. This final variation (and scene) clearly demonstrates the timpani's emancipation from its traditional roles of harmonic or rhythmic support and special effects. It is treated as a partner equal to the other orchestral instruments and integrated into the texture and structure of the movement.

In the theme and eight variations having the most significant percussion music in this opera, the first act contains a preponderance of drums, while in the second act the metal instruments have supremacy. This balance between membranophones and metallophones obtains in the total number of variations in the work, including those which have not been commented upon. At the risk of belabouring the point, it is important to remember Britten's consistency in using metallic percussion to represent the supernatural elements of this opera (and others). As the power of the ghosts increases, the metallic instruments are heard more frequently and are given greater prominence.

THE VOCAL MUSIC

It has been noted that except for The Turn of the Screw, the percussion instruments used in the instrumental sections of the chamber operas belong to the basic group of seven common to all three works. The additional instruments in The Rape of Lucretia, the tambourine and whip, also occur in Albert Herring. They are used sparingly, appearing only once each in the first opera and twice in close approximation in the second opera.

The tambourine highlights a situation involving memory in both operas. In the second scene of Act II of The Rape of Lucretia, Bianca remembers Lucretia as a young girl. The short taps on the tambourine suggest the innocence and playfulness of her past in stark contrast to her present circumstances (score, pp. 277-279). In Albert Herring (Act II, scene ii), Albert returns home with happy memories of the May-day party and starts fantasizing about Nancy. As he regretfully remembers "We never talked or walked lightheartedly through the woods," the tambourine and woodwind recall the rhythm and metre of Sid's first description of that pastime (in the second scene of Act I). A few minutes later, single taps of the tambourine remind Albert of his prize of twenty-five golden sovereigns lying unused in his pocket.

The whip is appropriately used at moments of shock. Since it conveys this element of surprise, its initial impact is diluted in inverse proportion to its repetition. In The Rape of Lucretia a single stroke of the whip is the only instance of its use in the whole work, allowing it to create its maximum dramatic effect. In Albert Herring,

a single stroke accentuates the Superintendent's wish for "a robbery with force" (score, p. 421). Later in the same scene, Mrs. Herring's grief-laden description of Albert's photograph is considerably lightened by repeated strokes of the whip as part of the "circus" music ("It was took on the pier at Felixstowe," Act III, scene i, score, pp.427-429).

Three of the additional percussion instruments in Albert Herring are also used in The Turn of the Screw: bells, glockenspiel, and woodblock. The bells and glockenspiel in Albert Herring do not have the symbolic and sinister aspects displayed in The Turn of the Screw. They are used for ironical, even farcical, effect. The bells in F, B-flat, and D announce the start of the Mayday festivities and accompany the celebration song sung by the schoolchildren in Act II. As the speeches finish and Albert is persuaded reluctantly to rise and speak, the bells quietly suggest the saintly virtue for which he is being rewarded. They occur again in the last act after Albert's wreath of orange blossoms has been found "crushed by a cart." Here they serve as a quasi-religious introduction to the funereal Threnody. At the same time, however, their reference to Albert's innocence is ironical in that the audience already knows that his escapade was with quite irreligious intentions.

The glockenspiel is used solely to represent clock chimes. In the first act the solemn deliberations of the committee to choose a May Queen are interrupted three times by the farcical chiming of the clock. Later, in Act II, Albert tries to muster enough courage to go out on the

town and broaden his experience. While he hesitates he is aware that time is running out and he has to make a decision. The glockenspiel repeats the notes of the clock in Act I, but this time they continue urgently as Albert sings "The tide will turn, the sun will set, while I stand here and hesitate--the clock begins its rusty whirr, catches its breath to strike the hour" (score, p. 378-379).

In both operas the woodblock is heard in negative contexts. It indicates Albert's desperation in the second scene of Act II, after he has overheard Sid and Nancy flirting. "O go! Go away! and leave me here alone with doubts and terrors you have never known!" he shouts, as the woodblock's clattering sixteenth-notes highlight his agitation (score, pp. 368-369). In The Turn of the Screw the woodblock conveys an atmosphere of ominous portent as Quint attempts to enchant Miles with fantastic imagery. At the beginning of scene viii At Night Quint calls to Miles in long melismatic phrases, then sings of "all things strange and bold." The words "The riderless horse, snorting, stamping, on the hard sea sand" are accompanied by alternate beats from the block and the side drum, played on the rim. The dry timbre of both instruments gives an unnatural impression of a static horse, enhancing the dramatic surrealism of this moment (score, pp. 135-137).

Besides the incidence of the woodblock, these two examples are curiously similar. Both scenes contain more percussion instruments than in any other scene in each of the respective operas. Six different percussion instruments occur in Act I, scene viii of The Turn of the Screw, while ten are used in Act II, scene ii of Albert Herring. In each

opera, these scenes are the dramatic focal points where action is taken that affects all subsequent development. In The Turn of the Screw, the ghosts succeed in enchanting the children. In Albert Herring, Albert resolves to break out of his customary behavioural pattern. The variety of percussion used in these scenes helps to emphasize their pivotal position in the dramatic development of each opera.

Castanets are included among the additional percussion instruments in Albert Herring. They are used only in the above scene, where they provide a cheerful indication of Albert's high spirits in a short interlude after he has left on his escapade (score, pp. 383-385).

Britten showed an increasing tendency in each opera to employ the percussion ensemble for defining particular characters and the relationships between them. Certain instruments or groups of instruments are associated with different roles, often with a correlation in pitch between the instrumental and the vocal range. In The Rape of Lucretia, for instance, the casting is in two symmetrical groups: four male and four female characters. The male element is pitted against the female element in the structure as well as in the plot of the opera, the first scenes of both acts describing actions of the men, the second scenes those of the women. Drums are prominent in the former situation. In the first scene the bass drum underlines the quarrel of the generals and stresses their competitiveness (score, pp. 17-26). The tenor drum accompanies the insults exchanged by Junius and Tarquinius (score, p. 29). Timpani rolls indicate their anger and Collatinus' order "Peace! Peace! Save your swords till we meet the Greeks" (score, p. 30).

The drums become associated with the men and particularly with Tarquinius. They penetrate the wholly different instrumental fabric of scene ii (the women's scene) only as a background warning of Tarquinius' approach while Lucretia calmly prepares to sleep (score, pp. 127-136). They contribute to the tension of the seduction scene in Act II. Gradually ascending tremoli on the timpani intensify Tarquinius' increasingly insistent demands (score, pp. 193-198). In the final scene timpani are used for the first time to accompany Lucretia, symbolizing Tarquinius' possession and destruction of her (score, pp. 268-271, 286, 291-293). Britten here uses the absence as well as the presence of percussion for dramatic effect. Timpani rolls played with wooden sticks underline Lucretia's despair as she sends a message to her husband Collatinus ("Give him this orchid," score, pp. 268-270). Then as she laughs madly and sends her love to the messenger, the stable boy, and the coachman, the absence of the timpani indicates her hysteria (score, p. 270). Solo timpani rolls accompany her final speech as she stabs herself at the climax of the tragedy. Britten had used both these devices in Peter Grimes.

In the women's scenes, the percussion is used quite differently. In the first act, the spinning scene uses the metal instruments of gong, cymbal, and triangle during the women's discourse. The drums are introduced only twice--to indicate the approach and then the presence of Tarquinius in the closing ensemble (score, pp. 149-156). Likewise in the final scene, only the triangle and cymbal accompany Lucia and Bianca's celebration of the spring morning. The triangle is frequently associat-

ed with Lucia in both scenes, and the gong or cymbal is likewise associated with Bianca.

Thus in this opera a clear connection is made between the lower-toned membranophones and the male characters and the higher-pitched metallophones and the female characters. At the same time, the symmetrical contrasts between male and female in the casting and structure of the drama are reflected in the way in which the percussion is used. Although the work is based largely on two themes representing Tarquinius and Lucretia, the percussion is not used thematically, as it is later in The Turn of the Screw. This is hardly surprising since the only melodic percussion instrument in The Rape of Lucretia is the timpani. The Turn of the Screw contains four such instruments: timpani, bells, glockenspiel, and celesta.

Albert Herring does not have the opposition of balanced forces that occurred in the first chamber opera. The cast consists of ten main characters--five male and five female voices. Here the symmetry ends, however, since the dramatic opposition is not between these two groups but between Albert and the rest of the village, as in Peter Grimes. The village is represented by nine characters which have been stereotypical of English village life in comedies and music-hall productions since the early nineteenth century. For this larger number of roles Britten provided a variety of different ensembles and characterizations.[8]

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[8] Eloquent descriptions of the different characters and their musical styles are available in Evans, The Music of Benjamin Britten, pp. 144-157.

Unlike The Rape of Lucretia, particular characters in Albert Herring are defined more by their vocal style (including parody) than by themes or instrumentation. Apart from the example of Lady Billows quoted above (p.122), there are few instances of associative scoring. The percussion and special effects illustrate the text and action, often using exaggeration for humourous or satirical effect. The triangle, for instance, mocks the pompous Lady Billows, the unctious vicar, and the fervent schoolmistress when they all sing of innocence. At the end of her speech, Miss Wordsworth presents Albert with two volumes of Foxe's Book of Martyrs. A single stroke of the gong suggests the doom of the book's title and the gloom of its contents. The effect is exaggerated a few measures later when the Vicar cites the same book as part of the national heritage (with The Bible and Shakespeare). In the next scene, the gong is again used to convey a feeling of doom and finality. Albert concludes his soul-searching by tossing a coin to help him decide whether to break away from his mother's apron strings. The gong sounds as he sings "Well you've gone and done it now! It's very plain you've burnt your boats and can't go back again" (score, p. 382).

Albert's self-questioning started previously in Act I, after Sid and Nancy taunted him with his dull and obedient lifestyle. After they leave he realizes that he is missing a great deal of fun. "Yes! Mum's uncommon keen about the need of living chaste and clean in word and deed. For what?" he sings. The timpani echoes his last two words with a rolled glissando upwards. As Albert describes his daily routine, the words "For what?" become an insistent refrain which the timpani con-

tinues to mimic (score, pp. 177-179). In addition to the immediate imitation of the question, the timpani's glissandi produce a gathering momentum of optimism and expectancy. This culminates in Albert's resolve to get away at the next opportunity. The timpani part is shown in Example 57 (score, p. 179).

Ex. 57. Albert Herring: Timpani imitates Albert's question, Act I, scene ii.

Many of the vocal ensembles are scored without percussion. A notable exception is the Threnody, in which the timpani and cymbal distort the meaning of the text with hilarious effect. Each of the nine vocal parts contributes a characteristic solo while the others mourn Albert's demise with a monotonous and morbid choral ground. No percussion is heard until the ninth solo is completed and all voices have repeated together their various texts. The timpani played fortissimo and a sforzando clash from the cymbal then introduce and accompany the vocal phrase "Grief is silent, Pity dumb..." This phrase is sung fortissimo with loud chords and tremolando support from the rest of the orchestra (score, pp. 470-474). This splendid climax to the funeral lament is finally interrupted by the sound of the shop bell as Albert reappears.

The percussion indicates several entrances and activities in the opera without the need for textual explanations. The bass drum an-

nounces the approach of Florence Pike to Mrs. Herring's greengrocery store (score, p. 187). Tremoli on the timpani announce the arrival of Lady Billows and the committee (score, pp. 193-194). In the last act, the ostinato on the side drum is played fortississimo con tutta forza as the small procession appears with Albert's crown (score, pp. 450-453). Albert drinks his lemonade laced with rum to the accompaniment of a long tremolo on the suspended cymbal (score, pp. 320-321). His high spirits and rebellion after the festivities are shown by his repeated ringing of the shop bell (notated in the score) on his return home (score, pp. 342-344). As he struggles to find a match, the cymbal produces a realistic hiss of escaping gas followed by a loud bang from the tenor drum as the gas explodes (score, pp. 348-349).

In contrast to The Rape of Lucretia, the percussion in Albert Herring tends to represent sentiments rather than particular persons. The same sentiment expressed by different characters is conveyed (and made humorous) by the use of the same instrument (triangle, gong) in varied contexts. Extended passages of a solo percussive instrument frequently indicate action and/or entrances (timpani, bells, cymbal, side drum). There is no correlation in pitch between the percussion and either voices or gender. However, the association of drums with Lady Billows and metallic instruments with Albert does complement the righteousness and innocence of their respective personalities.

There are fewer ensembles in The Turn of the Screw than in Albert Herring or The Rape of Lucretia. The texture also is more trans-

parent, the action being carried mainly by a succession of solos and duos. This is in keeping with the smaller cast of six voices (seven with the Prologue, usually sung by the same singer as Quint). The vocal parts are all in the high range: three sopranos, two trebles (the children), and a tenor. The opposing relationships between the characters are as ambiguous as the evil power of the ghosts. The children are victims of the power struggle between the "natural" figures (the Governess and Mrs. Grose) and the supernatural ones (Quint and Miss Jessel). However they are also the catalysts of the whole drama, and at times show an independence from both pairs of adults.

The characters are defined by several motives taken from the basic twelve-note set (see p.125). In addition the key structure of ascending white notes in Act I emphasizes the natural, human aspects; the descending flat keys and black notes of Act II underline the supernatural influence.[9] It is significant that of all the roles in the opera it is only the ghosts who are consistently associated with particular instruments--the metallophones of celesta and gong respectively.

The association of the celesta with Quint is developed gradually. The first time the instrument is heard, Quint is neither seen nor referred to in the text. In scene iii, shortly after the Governess' arrival at Bly, she learns that Miles has been expelled from school.

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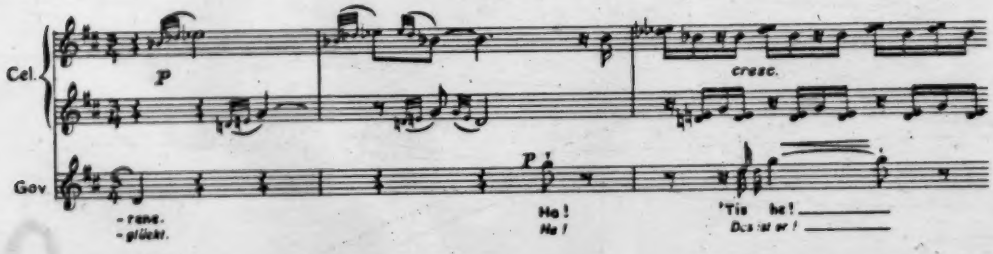
[9] Eric Walter White, Benjamin Britten: His Life and Operas (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), pp. 181-182.

As she reads the letter containing this news, Mrs. Grose watches her approvingly, "Now all will be well, we were far too long alone!" The celesta makes a single statement of Quint's motive as the Governess exclaims "Mrs. Grose! He's dismissed his school." This first reference to Quint is an ironical comment on Mrs. Grose's remark, as well as a hint of the ghost's malevolent control of the boy's behavior (score, p. 37). Britten made sure that this motive would not be overlooked by giving the celesta an exposed position and by avoiding the use of any other percussion until the end of this scene. Quint makes his first appearance in the next scene, again ironically, as the Governess finds herself "Alone, tranquil, serene." This time the celesta has an extended passage of several measures before the ghost vanishes. The celesta part (excerpt) and the Governess' startled reaction are shown below (score, p. 53).



Ex. 58. The Turn of the Screw: Celesta indicates Quint's first appearance, scene iv.

As Quint disappears the Governess sings a short motive ("Who is it?") which is derived from Quint's music on the celesta. This is assumed by the woodwinds and recurs after Quint's second appearance in the following scene. The motive is extended by the orchestra while

Mrs. Grose questions the Governess about what she saw (score, pp. 73-77). When Miss Jessel appears for the first time in scene vii the words are no longer necessary: the timpani plays the "Who is it?" motive. It is then repeated by different instruments as the Governess realizes that both children see the ghosts and are already influenced by them (score, pp. 125-130). By using the celesta and the timpani motivically, Britten conveys the insidious presence of the ghosts as well as the inability of the Governess to protect the children from them.

The first instrumental reference to Miss Jessel is also unmistakable. After the Governess has seen Quint for the second time, Mrs. Grose tells her of his activities before his death, and of how "he made free with her, too, with lovely Miss Jessel, governess to those pets." The gong is introduced with an F-sharp played on the horn, timpani, and double bass (score, p. 83). At Miss Jessel's first appearance by the lake the gong is sounded again, with F-sharp from the horn and piano (score, p. 125). It is repeated as the Governess sings "Miss Jessel! It was Miss Jessel!" At the scene's close, the ghosts are linked in symbolic partnership as the celesta and gong (with an F-sharp from the double bass) alternate (score, p. 130). Each successive occurrence of these instruments in Act I is of longer duration than the last, until both the instruments (and the ghosts of course) dominate the entire variation and scene which close the act (see page 126).

Metallic percussion instruments are prominent in the first two scenes of Act II and occur with greater frequency during this act than in the first half of the opera. The celesta, cymbal, and gong underline the ghosts' menacing celebration in Act II, scene i, "The ceremony of innocence is drowned" (score, pp. 176-184). The bells overshadow the rest of the orchestra in the long second scene. The peaceful bedroom scene is interrupted by the glockenspiel (see p. 129). The cymbal and gong emphasize Quint's orders to Miles in scene v. Miss Jessel's gong sounds repeatedly in scene vii, as she wins final victory over Flora. In scene viii, the celesta and cymbal accompany Quint's last struggle against the Governess for control of Miles.

Even before the increasing use of metallophones at the end of Act I, the incidence of these instruments represents the evil influence of the supernatural. This applies not only to the ghosts' celesta and gong but also to all the other metal instruments. Early in the drama, the children welcome the arrival of the Governess. Flora curtsies to the accompaniment of the cymbal--similar in timbre to Miss Jessel's gong. Miles bows to the sound of the triangle--not unlike Quint's celesta (score, pp. 20-24).[10] When the cymbal is heard again, in scene v, Mrs. Grose is telling the Governess about Quint's death. In effect, every time a metal instrument is played during this opera,

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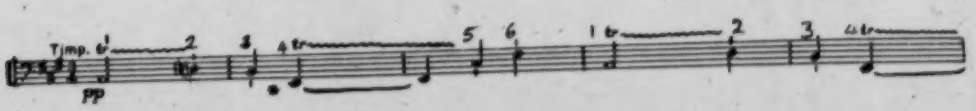
[10] In Act II, the children sometimes sing to the ghosts' instruments (the gong for Flora and the celesta for Miles), implying the power of the ghosts over them.

it is a reference to the supernatural.

The membranophones, in contrast, represent the human qualities of the characters. But because of their varied use, none of the drums can be directly associated with a particular person. The timpani, after its introduction with the Governess in the first scene, frequently coincides with her fear, however. The warning roll played with the fingers in scene iv and the "Who is it?" motive are examples in the first act. At the end of the churchyard scene in Act II, steady quarter-notes mark her resolve to "go away ... away from my fears, away from those horrors " (score, pp. 217-219). When she banishes Miss Jessel from her schoolroom, her cry "Be gone! You horrible, terrible woman!" is underlined by a long tremolo from the timpani on Miss Jessel's G-flat (enharmonic F-sharp).

The last scene of the opera features the timpani as the most important instrument. The Passacaglia, which forms the background to the desperate struggle for Miles' soul, is held together by seventeen repetitions of the ground on the timpani. The ground consists of the first six notes of the basic twelve-note set:



Ex. 59. The Turn of the Screw: Ground of the Passacaglia, Act II, scene viii.

Even in the well known Passacaglia in Peter Grimes the timpani did not play as an important role as it does here. In Peter Grimes,

the ground was announced by the timpani in only five of the forty repetitions. In the chamber opera, every statement is made by the timpani. Towards the end of the Passacaglia, as Miles becomes increasingly disturbed by the conflicting commands of Quint and the Governess, the tenor drum and side drum support the rhythm of the timpani. After Miles destroys the ghosts' power by uttering Quint's name, he falls dead in the Governess' arms. As a lament, she sings his song "Malo" to the accompaniment of free drumming on the timpani with the fingers. It gradually dies away as the drama ends.

The correlation of pitch between the percussion and voices in The Rape of Lucretia is observed in a different form in The Turn of the Screw. The high vocal range of the cast coincides with the predominance of metallic percussion which has been shown to represent supernatural or other-worldly elements. This coincidence also occurs in A Midsummer Night's Dream, Death in Venice, and the church parables (see Chap. IV). Where human sentiments in Albert Herring are conveyed by several percussion types, the expression of the emotions in The Turn of the Screw is restricted to the membranophones. Unlike the other chamber operas, The Turn of the Screw uses percussion both thematically and motivically. It is the first chamber opera to include the celesta and the tom-tom, and it is the only one which uses these and other special percussion (additional to the basic group) in the interludes.

CHAPTER IV

SYMBOLIC PERCUSSION IN THE CHURCH PARABLES

The church parables mark a fundamental stylistic change in Britten's operas. Their transparent textures, experimental techniques, and the dominant role given to percussion recur frequently in subsequent works, particularly in the last two operas, Owen Wingrave and Death in Venice, but also in such diverse works as the Cello Symphony, Children's Crusade, and Phaedra. Although the parables were seen as an exciting venture into new musical territory for Britten, his previous compositions show several precedents for the dramatic as well as musical elements which they exemplify. The framing device of unaccompanied plainsong, sung in procession and recession, was first used in A Ceremony of Carols (1942). Britten began to require audience involvement in the drama of Saint Nicolas (1948). The barrier between stage and audience was further broken down in Let's Make an Opera (1949), where the audience assists in rehearsing the children's opera, The Little Sweep. Noye's Fludde (1957) offers the most obvious precedent for the parables. This setting of the Chester miracle play, a medieval drama acted in church, shows Britten's progress away from oratorio towards church theatre. Conductor and orchestra do not intervene between the audience and the stage, but rather are placed to one side. As in Saint Nicolas, communal hymns are sung by the cast and the audience. The orchestra contains a large percussion section including handbells, which are used

again in Curlew River (1964), the first church parable. Unusual percussive effects are obtained from invented instruments, such as a row of slung mugs hit with a wooden spoon, and two sandpaper blocks.

The profound effect on Britten of the Japanese Noh theatre dictated the dramatic and musical structure of the church parables to a marked degree. Neither masks nor mime, heterophony, Japanese drumming techniques, nor robed musicians had previously appeared in his operas. However, he had already used the drumming techniques in the Sanctus of the War Requiem in 1961 (see above, p. 35), and his search for metrical freedom can be traced back to Peter Grimes and earlier works.

The influence of the Balinese percussion orchestra, the gamelan, became evident far sooner than the Japanese influences, in his only ballet, The Prince of the Pagodas (1956). In the pagoda music of Act II, the rhythmical complexities and exhilarating tone colours of vibraphone, celesta, piano, xylophone, bells, tom-toms, and gongs create a realistic impression of the brilliant shimmering sound of the bronze Balinese instruments. In the church parables a similar effect is produced from smaller forces, particularly in the march in praise of Merodak, the golden image, in The Burning Fiery Furnace (1966). Balinese scales differ between and identify each village orchestra in Bali. Instead of these scales Britten substituted plainsong, used heterophonically, with a different chant chosen as the thematic basis for each parable. Britten had encountered Balinese music long before his oriental tour, albeit second-hand, when he visited the Canadian composer

Colin McPhee in 1941 and played and recorded McPhee's two-piano transcriptions of gamelan music.[1]

Curlew River tells the tale of a widowed mother, mad with grief, crossing the river to search for her lost son. She finds his grave, which has become a place of healing and pilgrimage for the local people. His spirit appears and blesses her, whereupon she is restored to sanity and peace. For the librettist, Britten was fortunate in obtaining the services of the eminent poet and author, William Plomer, who had spent several years in Japan. From his knowledge of Noh theatre, Plomer helped Britten transfer the fifteenth-century Japanese drama of Sumidagawa into a medieval Western setting, while keeping essential Japanese elements of the story and style of performance intact.[2] The Burning Fiery Furnace (1966) is based on the Old Testament miracle of the three Jews thrown into the furnace by King Nebuchadnezzar. The Prodigal Son (1968) relates the New Testament parable of the young son who returns home to a forgiving father after squandering his patrimony in dissolute city life.

All three parables are treated as medieval mystery plays to be performed in a church rather than in an opera house or theatre. The all-male cast and musicians are dressed as monks who process through

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[1] Mitchell, Pictures from a Life, plates 174 and 176.

2 Mary Ruth Rhoads, "Influences of Japanese Hogaku Manifest in Selected Compositions by Peter Mennin and Benjamin Britten" (Ph.D. dissertation, Michigan State University, 1969), pp. 154-158 and pp. 342-343. A detailed comparison between the Japanese original and Curlew River is given in this work.

the audience to the stage intoning unaccompanied plainchant. The Abbot then addresses a homily to the audience concerning the miracle or parable about to be enacted. The chief characters ceremoniously don masks and robes on the stage[3] and proceed to perform the miracle. At the close of each drama, the "monks" resume their habits, the Abbot reminds the audience of the message conveyed, and cast and musicians recess through the church repeating the first plainsong chant. A period of silence is required at the beginning and end of each performance which is not explicit in the scores. Before the procession started, it was Britten's practice to ask the entire cast to sit in silence for fifteen minutes, in order to prepare themselves for the drama.[4] The last page of each score carries a direction for no lights to be turned on until after an appreciable pause at the conclusion of the work, particularly if the performance is in a darkened church in the evening. Each work lasts little more than an hour.

The parables are not a trilogy, as they have sometimes been called, since there is no theme or character common to all three. However, the restrained and formalized manner of production, the similar

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[3] See A. Lewis Martin, "A Musico-Dramatic Study of the Church Choral Dramas of Benjamin Britten" (M.A. thesis, University of North Carolina, 1975), p. 38. Martin incorrectly states that the actors "leave the stage area to be costumed for the 'inner play'."

[4] This information comes from the late Cecil Aronowitz, the violist, appointed the first Director of String Studies at the Britten-Pears School for Advanced Musical Studies at Snape, in conversation in 1978 with the author in Aldeburgh.

musical and dramatic style, and the symbolic use of instruments, gestures, and costume together comprise a synthesized tryptich in a new genre. Vertical diatonic harmony is virtually abandoned in favour of horizontal heterophonic variation of the unison melodic line. Succeeding notes of the melody are often piled up in accompaniment, creating cluster chords. Rather than consisting of set "numbers," the vocal style is distinguished by a continuous flow of declamatory parlando or accompanied recitative, occasional arioso, and Sprechstimme, interspersed by heterophonic choruses. The drama of each parable proceeds without the interruption of intermissions or division between scenes. There are no set metres,[5] but there is a frequent use of unmeasured bars, polymetre, and metrical non-alignment between the voices and their accompanying instruments. The musical texture is extremely spare, with associative scoring as a habitual feature. Owing to the unique character of the parables, the symbolism of the percussion and of some of the other instruments will be discussed more fully than in previous parts of this study in order to convey their singular dramatic impact.

Britten's choice of instruments for the three parables reflects his careful attention to his exotic subject matter drawn from ancient oriental and biblical sources and also shows his economical use of forces to achieve maximum dramatic effect. Curlew River requires only seven instrumentalists, The Burning Fiery Furnace eight, and the Prodi-

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[5] Occasional metre-signatures are included, for some sections of concerted voices or instruments, but they are always written in parentheses.

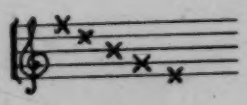
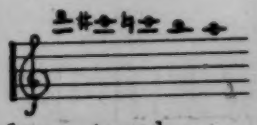
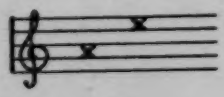
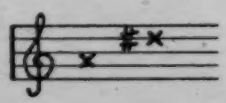
gal Son eight, with five additional Acolytes to play one percussion instrument each on the stage.

The style, characters, and plot of each parable are illustrated in a sound-frame which Britten arrayed from a small group of unusual instruments whose players are robed and included as protagonists of the drama, and who perform without a conductor. Britten avoided the use of conventional ensembles that would remind one of the tone-color of the modern Western orchestra. Instead he chose a basic group of six contrasting instruments: flute, horn, viola, double-bass, harp and chamber-organ, with an increasing number of percussion instruments in each succeeding parable. To this basic group he added two instruments, the alto trombone in The Burning Fiery Furnace and the trumpet in The Prodigal Son which are heard only in those works and which give an unmistakable tonal character to each parable. The flute, although part of the basic instrumental group, is so closely attached to the role of the Madwoman in Curlew River that it serves the same function in that parable as the trombone and trumpet do in the other two works. The instrumentation for each parable is shown in Table 9 on the following page.

The soundscape created by the instrumental group, with the visual elements of masks, mime, and costume, helps to suggest the period and location of each parable. At the same time, however, it also reflects the two very diverse cultural backgrounds from which the works sprang. The melodic writing for the flute, particularly in Curlew River, reminds one of the Japanese shakuhachi, the popular vertical flute, and of the nokan, the transverse flute (the only melodic instrument used in Noh theatre). Drums give a universal antique effect, but the

TABLE 9

SCORING OF THE CHURCH PARABLES

Curlew River	The Burning Fiery Furnace	The Prodigal Son
flute/piccolo horn viola double-bass harp chamber organ	flute/piccolo horn alto trombone viola double-bass harp chamber organ	alto flute/piccolo horn trumpet in D viola double-bass harp chamber organ
percussion: 5 untuned drums approximate range:  5 suspended handbells:  large tuned gong (in C)	percussion: 5 untuned drums 2 tuned woodblocks:  anvil (small untuned steel plate) lyra glockenspiel Babylonian drum: multiple whip (4 varying sized untuned whips) small cymbals	percussion: 5 untuned drums 2 tuned woodblocks:  large tuned gong: high-pitch woodblock conical gourd-rattle small Chinese cymbal Acolytes on stage: small drum (tambour) pair of small cymbals tambourine sistrum (jingle-rattle) small bell-lyra:

five in the parables are used much in the same way as the three drums of the Noh ensemble--the taiko, o-tsuzumi, and ko-tsuzumi.[6] They serve to indentify different musical events with various ostinato patterns. The flute and drum are reminiscent of the European pipe and tabor, the popular accompaniment to secular song and dance in the Middle ages.

In The Burning Fiery Furnace the small cymbals, the lyra-glockenspiel, and the Babylonian drum suggest the heterophonic and rhythmic structure of the Balinese gamelan. The timbre of these instruments is also akin to the oriental metallophones.[7] From a Western point of view, clashed cymbals and deep unpitched drums have barbaric associations appropriate to ancient Babylon. Cymbals and drums have represented royal and processional events for centuries. The instruments heard in these works thus create an ambience which contains ancient, primitive, ethnomusicological, medieval, and religious elements as well as allusions to secular folk song and dance.

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[6] The hayashi ensemble of Noh theatre consists of four instruments: the flute (nokan), shoulder drum (ko-tsuzumi), side drum (o-tsuzumi), and a floor drum played with sticks (taiko). See Malm, Music Cultures, pp. 199-201. See also Malm, Japanese Music and Musical Instruments (Rutland, Vermont: Charles E. Tuttle 1959), pp. 119-127 for an excellent description of Noh instruments and their techniques.

[7] Among the large variety of flutes, gongs, and bamboo and metal-resonating instruments which make up different gamelan ensembles are hand cymbals (tjèngtjèng) and drums (kendang). See Apel, "Bali," Harvard Dictionary of Music, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1969), pp. 69-70.

Using the parables as twentieth-century versions of the medieval liturgical dramas, Britten has kept within the possible instrumentation of his Western models. These devotional and artistic plays, performed within European churches between circa 1100-1275, had little written instructions for specified instruments, but included many other details of production. The musical notation often indicated no more than a single vocal line, but larger works show evidence of the types of instruments used.[8] Percussion instruments included brass bells, tinkling cymbals (finger cymbals), hand bells and chime bells (tuned to an octave on a wooden frame), and larger cymbals and drums of varying sizes.[9] The use of a portative organ was likely, since it was a common instrument in secular as well as religious performances of the time.

All these instruments, or their modern equivalents, are used in the parables. In the following illustration (page 156) from a late eleventh-century Bible, it will be noted that four of Britten's basic group of seven instruments are pictured, together with the chime bells, which he replaced with handbells in Curlew River.

In this parable, the handbells are unusual since they are suspended on a frame and played with xylophone beaters, similar to the way in which the chime bells are shown in the plate on the following page. Usually, each bell has a clapper and is played, one in each hand,

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[8] W.L. Smolden, "Liturgical Drama," Early Medieval Music Up to 1300, New Oxford History of Music, ed. Dom Anselm Hughes, rev. ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1955), II, 177.

[9] Fletcher Collins Jnr., The Production of Medieval Church Music-Drama (Charlottesville, Va.: University Press of Virginia, 1972), pp. 42-44.

Plate 2. Harp, bell chimes, recorder, vielle, and positive organ. Illustration from a late eleventh-century Bible.[10]

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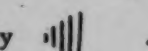
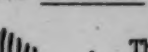
[10] Donald Jay Grout, A History of Western Music, rev. ed. (New York: Norton, 1973), p. 72.

with a lift of the arm. This is the only parable in which these bells appear. Their distinctive timbre, reminiscent of the Middle Ages, makes a fine contrast with that of the glockenspiel in The Burning Fiery Furnace and the small bell-lyra in The Prodigal Son.

The relative sizes and characters of the varied percussion instruments in each parable indicate the extent to which Britten was prepared to go to achieve an authentic atmosphere for his medieval, Babylonian, and Jewish-pastoral scenarios. The five untuned drums are the only instruments of the extensive percussion section which are played in all three parables; they form a dominant part of the whole texture, but they are used in different ways. As in the Japanese Noh plays, they are played with thimbles, the bare fingers, the flat of the hand, with soft and hard sticks, and at the edge and centre of the drum. In Curlew River, the drummer uses the slowly accelerating tremolo of the Japanese taiko, signified in the score by  . In the next two parables the reverse effect is added: the tremolo starts on a "close roll" and loses speed, indicated by  . This technique is also used by other instruments in the parables, including the hand-bells in Curlew River, the Babylonian drum in The Burning Fiery Furnace, and the cymbals in The Prodigal Son. Blades describes the original sound as he heard it in Japan:

> In Shinto temples the giant drum (da-daiko) is struck to herald the day. The awe-inspiring strokes are delivered with an impressive accelerando, suggestive of the approaching activity of daylight. The increase in tempo of the strokes is so subtle that it could be likened to the bouncing of a celluloid ball on a hardtopped table.[11]

This technique is illustrated below, played on the drums with thimbles (Curlew River, rehearsal,score, p. 1).

Ex. 60. Curlew River: Japanese drum technique.

The five drums are most frequently used for rhythmic punctuation, the announcement of dramatic events, and the support of the more direct statements of the Abbot, chorus, and soloists. There are numerous instances where they illuminate the text dramatically.

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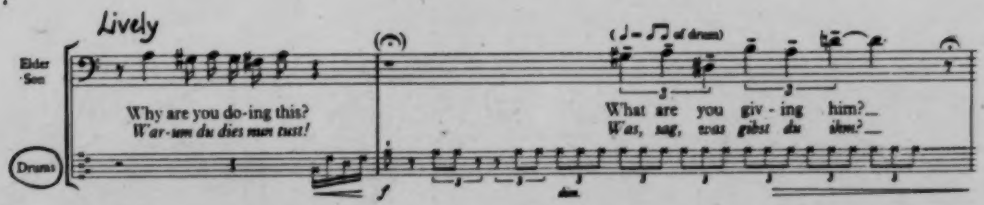
[11] Percussion Instruments, p. 129.

For the first two-thirds of Curlew River, the drums are the only percussion instruments used, until the gong sounds (score, p. 90). The drums indicate the heavy footsteps of the Traveller, as the chorus sings "Far, far northward he must go; weary days of travel lie before him " (score, pp. 15-16). They emphasize the threat of the Ferryman and chorus, when the Madwoman is pleading to be allowed into the boat (score, pp. 36-37). They announce the arrival of the boat on the other side of the river and bring the boat's occupants back to reality after the Ferryman's narrative (score, p. 64).

The second parable, which is more extrovert in mood, introduces other percussion instruments at an earlier point--the entrance of the king (score, p. 12). In this parable, the drums mimic the contour of the boys' Sprechstimme in The Entertainers' Dance (score, pp. 29-33). This is an effect similar to that of the tamburo accompanying Puck in A Midsummer Night's Dream. The fear of the Three Jews ("We do not lack enemies") is hinted at by the drums (score, p. 57). The stealth and intrigue of the Astrologer is effectively represented by soft drum beats with thimbles, as the wizard influences the king against the Three Jews (pp. 89-93).

Finally, in The Prodigal Son, the cymbal is given a part almost as important as the drums, before even the robing ceremony has taken place (see below page 169 concerning the Tempter/Abbot). In this work, rhythmic drum beats indicate the monotony and discipline of working in the fields, as the chorus sings "To till the ground, and hoe rank weeds away" (score, pp. 17-19). Drums convey the anger of

the Elder Son, against his Father for giving the Younger Son his portion (score, pp. 46-47):



Ex. 61. The Prodigal Son: Drums indicating Elder Son's anger.

After the Younger Son's drunken stupor, the Tempter brings him to his senses with a fierce admonishment, "Your pleasures must be paid for, pay what is due." Once again, it is the drums which awaken the Son and the audience to a change of mood and new action.

Whenever Britten could not find the instruments that he required, he invented them. James Blades, who had played in at least ten of Britten's operas, collaborated with the composer on many occasions to produce replicas of old instruments and to create new ones.

The last of the percussion group in Curlew River is the large gong tuned to middle C. This is referred to in the score as "big bell" (Curlew River, p. 90), but Blades states that Britten first asked him to produce the sound of a ferryboat bell:

> 'Not a bell or a gong-you know what I want,' he said. Now when a composer of the calibre of Britten makes such a comment there is no point in arguing. If you cannot purchase the instrument you make it or get it made, and that is just what I did. With the help of the Mitcham Foundry, a bronze plate was cast and machined to sound the required pitch. I sent it to 'The Red House' and received an immediate reply from Ben. 'Splendid, please get another as a spare.'[12]

The Burning Fiery Furnace requires three percussion instruments which are not used in the other two parables: an anvil--a small untuned steel plate made from a Rolls Royce automobile spring(!)[13]--which announces the entrance of King Nebuchadnezzar with a primitive clang; a large bass Babylonian drum, played by the double-bassist; and, a multiple whip for the crackling flames of the furnace. In Noye's Fludde the whip had been used with particular effect to evoke two opposing moods, the first when Noah's wife slaps his face and the second in a calmer moment when it portrays the gentle flapping of sails in the breeze before the storm. The drum, of course, is one of the most ancient and widespread of all instruments. A Sumerian vase of circa 3,000 B.C. shows a huge man-sized bass drum, and drums together with harps, lutes, flutes,and oboes appear on artifacts of the Babylonian era (circa 2,000-1,000 B.C.).[14]

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[12] Blades, Drum Roll, p. 236.

[13] Ibid., p. 245.

[14] Apel, "Drum" and "Mesopotamia," Harvard Dictionary, pp. 247 and 522.

In taking such pains to obtain these unusual instruments, Britten was not motivated by the wish for a bizarre effect to impress the audience but, as Blades and other collaborators point out, he was trying to reproduce the sounds and appearance of Old Testament Babylonian instruments.[15] The anvil, drum, and whip can be seen in Plate 3, below on page 171, together with other percussion used in The Burning Fiery Furnace.

In The Prodigal Son, the last of the parables, three extra instruments are added to the percussion section. Two of them, the sistrum and the tambourine, are to be played on the stage for the Servants' Dance to welcome the Younger Son home (score, pp. 116-138). The sistrum was an ancient Egyptian rattle, and a similar instrument was used in Sumeria circa 3,000 B.C.[16] The medieval triangle is often illustrated with rings on the lower bar, which would have sounded much the same as the loose bars on the older sistrum.[17]

The tambourine, known as the timbrel in the Middle Ages, is almost as ancient as the sistrum, although the tabret or tof of the ancient Israelites may not have had the pairs of jingles which have been part of the tambourine since second-century Roman times. This instrument

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[15] Blades, Percussion Instruments, p. 424.

[16] Apel, "Sistrum" Harvard Dictionary, p. 779.

[17] Blades and Jeremy Montague, Early Percussion Instruments: from the Middle Ages to the Baroque, Early Music Series, no. 2 (London: Oxford University Press, 1976), pp. 11 and 13. The illustration in Plate 3 is from Blades, Percussion Instruments, plates 58 and 59.

has both sacred and secular connotations; it was frequently shown in the hands of angels in medieval illustrations, but it was also used by jugglers, showmen, and wandering minstrels.[18] Britten specified again that all the Acolytes' instruments should look biblical.[19]

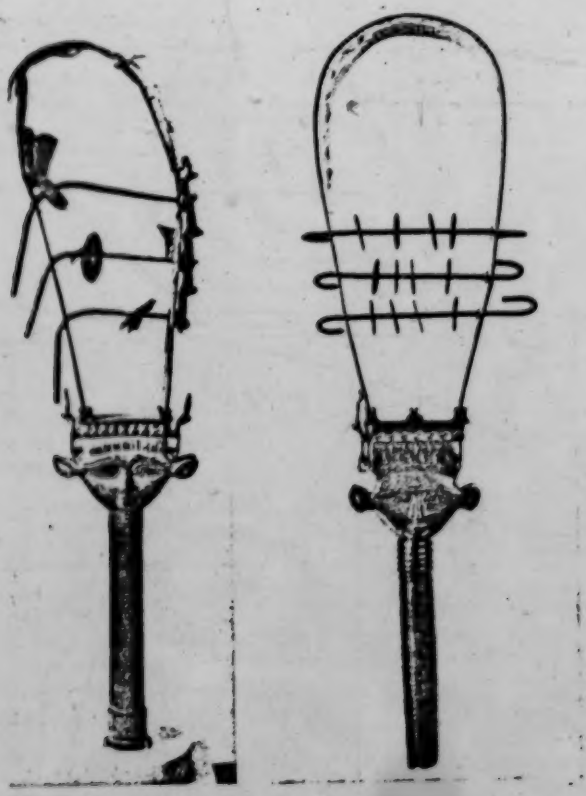

Plate 3. Two bronze sistra. Egyptian, late period, after 850 B.C. The discs and rods of the one on the right are modern.

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[18] Blades and Montague, Early Percussion Instruments, pp. 14-15.

[19] Blades, Drum Roll, p. 250.

The last additional instrument is perhaps the most original example of Britten's inventiveness in realizing the dictates of his inner ear. Some kind of rattle was required to imitate the sound of the Prodigal Son's feet plodding on his journeys to and from the city. Of all the percussion which Blades was asked to provide for this parable, this was the most difficult. Although Hindemith had obtained a similar effect from a tin box filled with sand in his Kammermusik no. 1, the result was not considered suitable for Britten's purpose. Blades describes his experiments with several alternatives and the completely new instrument that eventually resulted from his efforts:

> I made a few experiments with gourd rattles such as maracas, and in answer to an invitation from Mr. Britten went to the Red House with a sizeable case of shakers of several descriptions. After lunch, over which we discussed the entire percussion requirements for the opera, we started work on the rattle. Ben seemed most interested in the sound of a cabaca: a gourd with an exterior mesh of beads which, when spun in the palm of the hand, produced a distinct 'shush'. 'A very good sound, Jim,' said Ben, 'but what else have you?' I said, 'Can we try a Latin-American chocolo?' This is a tube rattle which when tilted from side to side causes the interior rattling pieces (seeds or similar) to strike alternately the small vellum at each end of the tube. 'Very good--we are getting near,' said Ben. Then, after a pause he added 'but what I really had in mind was a left and a right foot.' A left and a right foot! It seemed to me that the rattling pieces had to strike either differently tensioned skins or different sized skins. So back to the 'Blades factory' and, from a sheet of fibre, I made a conical 'gourd rattle' which gave a high and low 'shush' as well as a tiny thump. In due course I demonstrated this to B.B., who said, 'Marvellous, but could you mute it in the quiet parts?' Mute it in the quiet parts! After a little experimenting, the 'muted' effect was produced by placing the gourd in a cardboard 'jacket' and covering part of each vellum with a handkerchief and using my fingers to

adjust the tone further.

The conical gourd rattle caused considerable interest at Aldeburgh. Quite often whilst taking my stroll along the sea front I was asked, 'What makes the effect of the boy trudging on his journey?'[20]

This unique instrument is shown below in Plate 4.[21]

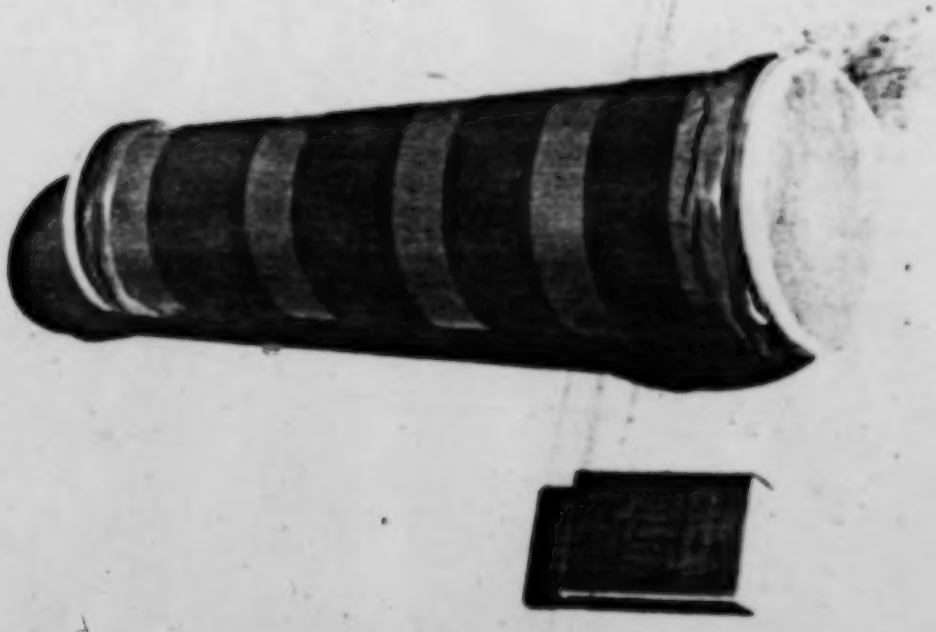

Plate 4. Conical gourd-rattle constructed for The Prodigal Son.

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[20] Ibid., p. 251.

[21] Photograph by James Blades, kindly provided by the Britten-Pears Library.

The use to which Britten put the instrumental ensemble, while often producing an ancient sound effect, is far from archaic. He requires unusual techniques like glissandi, scordatura, tremolandi, harmonics, and pizzicati, and includes some which have only recently been adopted by professional musicians, such as flutter-tonguing on the flute[22] in Curlew River (p. 25), and others which are not even yet accepted into common practice, such as the drums' unmeasured accelerando with tremolando mentioned above (p.157, see also Example 62 on page 167 for an example with the reverse effect, from The Prodigal Son, p. 2). Several different tempi happen simultaneously, indicated by dotted barlines and instructions in the score (see Curlew River, p. 18 and 19), and there is a new sign for an indeterminate pause (~ "curlew" sign) directing the performer to listen and wait until the other performers have reached the next barline or meeting-point. An additional responsibility--perhaps unique in opera--is placed on each musician, who is required to take the lead "whenever the music demands it" in the absence of a conductor, sometimes from a gesture or movement from the singers at various points throughout each work.[23]

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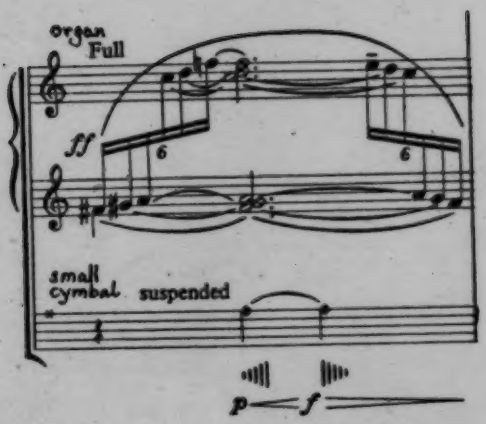
[22] Flutter-tonguing (Flatterzunge) was introduced by Richard Strauss (1864-1949). See Apel, "Tonguing," Harvard Dictionary, p. 857.

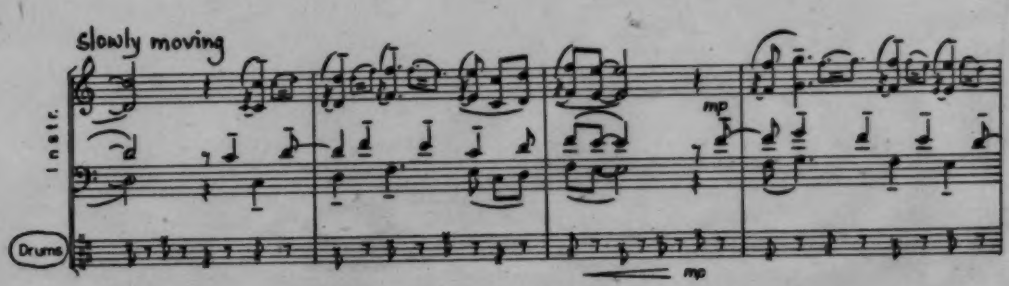
[23] See Imogen Holst, "Introduction," Curlew River, rehearsal score (London: Faber Music, 1965) and introductions to the other two parables.



Ex. 62. The Prodigal Son: Two types of taiko-style drum technique, played on a small suspended cymbal.

Britten did not use his instruments for a great deal of concerted ensemble playing. On the contrary, the music is often very sparse and soloistic in nature, with each instrument apparently intended to blend with the voices and other instruments alternately (or horizontally) rather than simultaneously (or vertically). Apart from accompanying choruses, substantial instances of concerted instrumental scoring are rare. They consist of the robing and de-robing ceremonies at the beginning and end of each parable, the Procession around the church in The Burning Fiery Furnace, and the homeward journey of the Young Son in the last parable. Other instances when the instruments play together are limited to interludes at the beginning or end of dramatic events--for instance the launching of the ferryboat in Curlew River (pp. 50-51), the entry of King Nebuchadnezzar in The Burning Fiery Furnace (pp. 13-14), and the drunken stupor of the Young Son and Parasites in The Prodigal Son (pp. 70-71).

The infrequency with which Britten used the considerable variety of percussion in ensemble is remarkable, particularly in view of the time and effort spent selecting each instrument. The examples cited above indicate how these instruments too are used in an economical and soloistic manner: the launching music is accompanied by tremolandi on one drum only, the King's entry by single strokes of the anvil, and the Son's journey by the rhythmical gourd-rattle. The robing ceremonies all have single rising beats on each of the five drums, and the de-robing ceremonies have single falling beats on the same instruments, giving a mirror effect. Since the five strokes are made within the framework of a (rare) time-signature of $\frac{4}{4}$, this ostinato pattern begins on a different beat of the bar each time it occurs. This method of metrical displacement had been used by Britten as early as Peter Grimes, where each successive statement of the Passacaglia ground started on a different beat in the bar (see above, p. 60). The drum pattern in the robing ceremonies is shown in Example 63 (Curlew River, p. 6):



Ex. 63. Drum ostinato in robing ceremonies.

The parables' economical use of the orchestra is closely linked with Britten's method of characterization. Particular instruments are often reserved for the portrayal of a specific event, character, or element in each drama. It is significant, for instance, that in Curlew River and The Burning Fiery Furnace, the Abbot's homily to the congregation is accompanied by the organ and drums. In the last parable, however, the Abbot is already acting the part of the Tempter at the beginning and does not contribute to the introductory plainsong. In this case his accompanying instruments are organ and cymbal, instead of drums. This technique of orchestration presents some particularly rich examples of associative scoring.[24]

In Curlew River the percussion group never play together. The tuned gong is sounded only as a funeral knell, as the Ferryman exhorts the Madwoman to pray by the tomb, and it expresses their grief at her son's death (score, pp. 90-92). The sole use of the handbells creates a spiritual atmosphere while the Madwoman prays and the chorus sings a plainsong hymn to the guardian angels before the miraculous appearance of the boy's spirit (score, pp. 93-113).[25] This passage is the only

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[24] In the first parable the horn identifies the Ferryman (Curlew River, pp. 8-9), the double-bass and harp introduce the Traveller (score, pp. 14-16), and, as mentioned before, the flute represents the Madwoman (and also the curlew birds with which she identifies her grief).

[25] A similar use of bells to create an expectant atmosphere is in the sounding of the sanctuary bell just before the climax of the Eucharist in the Church's liturgy. Britten was certainly familiar with this effect. In fact, while working on the parable in Venice, he attended mass at the monastery of San Giorgio Maggiore, where he was so impressed by the ritual robing of the Celebrant that he incorporated the robing ceremony into the parables. See Herbert, The Operas of Benjamin Britten, p. 48.

instance in the parables of Latin plainchant accompanied by bells and other instruments. It emphasizes the archaic quality of the music and drama and demonstrates Britten's ability to integrate remote styles into his own personal compositional idiom.

Again in The Burning Fiery Furnace, separate percussion instruments are reserved for particular elements: the flames are indicated by the multiple whip (score, pp. 102-116); the anvil is only played to announce the King's ceremonial arrival (score, pp. 12-19); and, the woodblocks are used only with the flute in the dance of the Entertainers (score, pp. 27-36).

Ex. 64. The Burning Fiery Furnace: Woodblocks in the dance of the Entertainers.

The latter music can be compared to the "Tongs and Bones" music in A Midsummer Night's Dream, where a sopranino recorder and woodblocks, also in fifths, play in a similar style and create a similar mood (vocal score, pp. 146-149). The lyra-glockenspiel and small cymbals are silent until the processional march around the church in praise of Merodak, where they take on the style and tone-colour of the gamelan orchestra (score, pp. 74-81). The repetitive five-bar phrase played by the glockenspiel is shown on page 173, in Example 65. This example

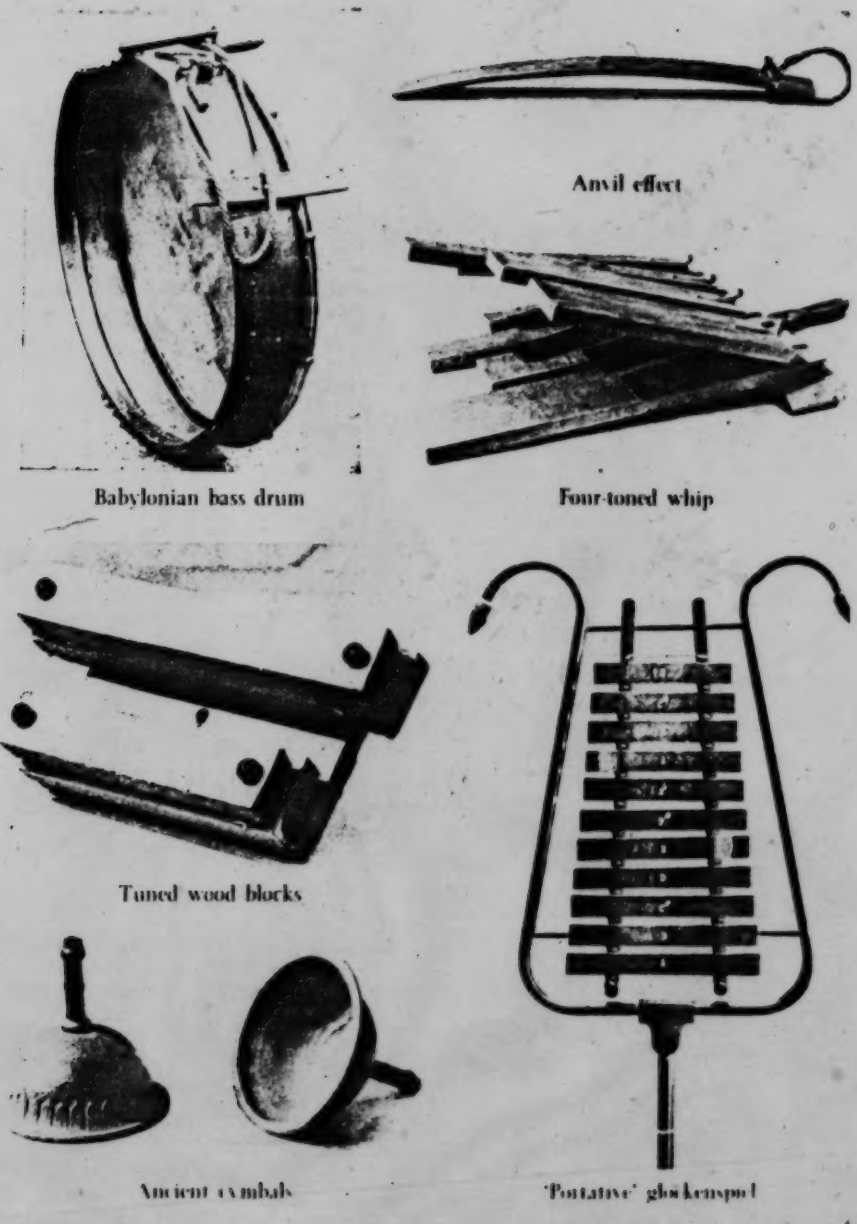


Plate 5. Percussion instruments in The Burning Fiery Furnace, from Blades, Drum Roll, plate 31.

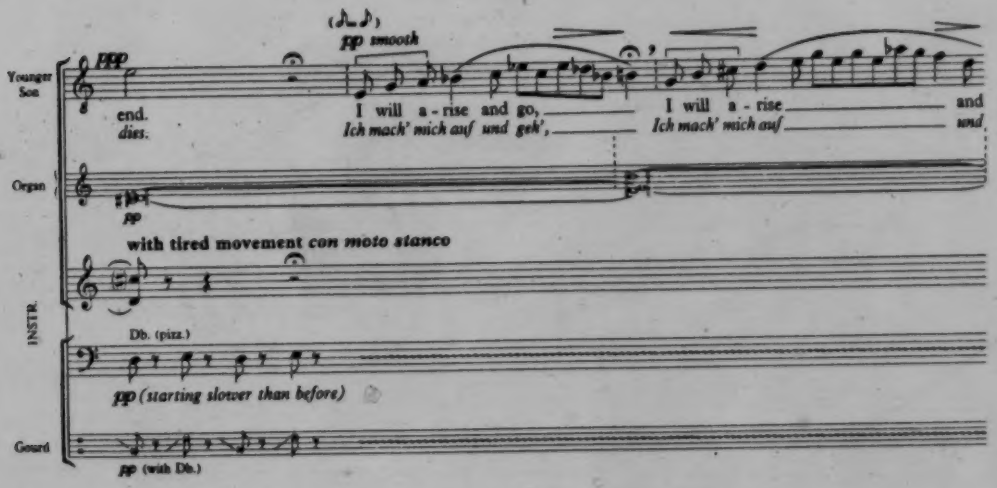
also shows the Babylonian drum which is heard here for the first time; it is retained after the march to add ominous thuds and rolls to the pagan hymn to the golden idol (score, pp. 82-88).

The mellow tone of the alto flute emphasizes the pastoral serenity and warmth of the Father in the third and last parable. However, both the Tempter and the Younger Son, the two main actors in the play, have two-sided personalities reflected by two instruments each. When the Tempter makes his evil intentions and achievements most clear, the cymbal warns the listener, but as he subtly puts thoughts into the Younger Son's mind and leads him into temptation, one hears the enigmatic harp (The Prodigal Son, score, p. 25). The Younger Son is represented as a quiet, obedient boy by the viola, but his extrovert wishes and foolhardy acts are indicated by the trumpet (score, pp. 60-61).

As in the previous parables, separate percussion instruments are reserved for special effects: the gourd-rattle is used only for the Younger Son's footsteps to and from the city (score, pp. 50-60 and 107-112); the gong is associated with the dark delights of love in his second temptation (score, pp. 74-81); and, the woodblocks are used in the Gamblers' chorus, where he loses everything (score, pp. 84-89). The "biblical" instruments of the Acolytes make up the Servants' Dance to welcome the Younger Son back home at the end of the drama, but, unlike the dance of the Entertainers in the second parable, they do not have much opportunity to show their distinctive timbres since they play in ensemble with the rest of the orchestra while the Servants sing a

Ex. 65. The Burning Fiery Furnace: Gamelan-style processional march.

chorus of praise (pp. 116-138). The gourd-rattle imitating the Younger Son's dragging footsteps as he decides to return home is shown below, in Example 66 (score, p. 107).



Ex. 66. The Prodigal Son: Conical gourd-rattle, the Son's journey home.

The percussive focus for all three parables is provided by the five untuned drums. Metallophones, wooden, and rattling instruments are used more frequently in the second and third parables than they are in the first parable. As in the works discussed in Chapter III, metal instruments often signify supernatural or fantastic aspects of different characters and events. Examples include the gong and bells in Curlew River, the anvil announcing the king, and gamelan-style march in The Burning Fiery Furnace, and the cymbal representing the Tempter in The Prodigal Son. In all these works, the percussion ensemble becomes an essential dramatic and interpretative tool for the composer's exposition of the drama.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Britten's non-staged works and operas show the development of his percussion writing over a period of forty years. Even in the pre-operatic period, he used innovative effects and unusual instruments such as the sandpaper block, the wind machine, and the reversed recording of the cymbal in the film music. In the staged works, one can observe a remarkable change of focus of the percussion from straightforward imitation to abstract symbolism between the earliest works and the latest ones. The percussion section in Peter Grimes played a relatively subordinate role within the thick texture of the other orchestral instruments. Percussive effects were mainly imitative with different instruments chosen for specific dramatic events and atmosphere. A Midsummer Night's Dream, from the middle period, exploited the metallophones in their association with the dominant and supernatural characters of the opera. Britten's later preference for transparent textures was coupled, in his last opera Death in Venice, with a more specialized use of the percussion. Associative scoring not only indicated different persons, but also subtle qualities of character and mood which were evoked by particular sonorities of the instruments. The large variety of percussion instruments became the vehicle for expressing the main dramatic conflict of the opera.

The smaller scope of the chamber operas allowed Britten to experiment with the colouristic properties of single percussion instruments and to begin to use them for motivic and thematic reference. By the time of The Turn of the Screw, recitative, aria, and ensemble had become blended into a continuous melodic style. The percussion writing likewise functioned in a more integrated manner, representing abstract elements such as human fears and supernatural menace.

The new genre of the church parables demonstrated the ritualistic and symbolic use of percussion derived largely from Britten's experience with oriental musical styles. Techniques and instrumentation from other cultures combined with invented instruments became the means for reviving the form of the Western medieval mystery play. Percussion instruments were chosen for their pictorial and historical significance in addition to the appropriate tone colours required for dramatic characterization. Rhythmic and metric freedom became specific features of an austere dramatic framework. Japanese drumming methods and Asian heterophony were extended to other instruments in these works and in Britten's last two operas.

Although these developments have been discussed with the selected operas grouped according to their three different types, additional insight can be gained if the representative works are examined chronologically. The increasing variety of percussion instruments and their progressively greater symbolic use are shown in Table 10 on the following page.

TABLE 10

CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER OF SELECTED OPERAS

Date	Opera	Chapter	Type	Percussion	Significant Use of Percussion
1945	Peter Grimes	II	Full-scale Opera	13	Mainly drums and unpitched instruments; atmospheric moods, dramatic events.
1946	The Rape of Lucretia	III	Chamber	9	Mainly drums; associative scoring for groups of characters-drums/men, metal/women.
1947	Albert Herring	III	Chamber	13	Drums in instrumental music, but more metallophones used to express sentiments, text, and action. Various instruments used for special effects.
1954	The Turn of the Screw	III	Chamber	12	Prominent associative scoring: Celesta/Quint, Gong/Miss Jessel, metallophones represent supernatural. Membranophones express human emotions.
1960	A Midsummer Night's Dream	II	Full-scale Opera	15	Prominent associative scoring for groups of characters and single roles. Correlation between high melodic percussion and high voices. Metallophones represent supernatural.
1964	Curlew River	IV	Church parable	3	Symbolic percussion, ritualistic, pictorial, historical significance. Metallophones represent supernatural, fantastic. Very prominent associative scoring, extreme economical use of instruments, Japanese drum techniques, heterophonic voices and gamelan music, several invented instruments. Metrical and rhythmic non-alignment in voices and instruments, melodic line creates harmony, different instruments represent aspects of character.
1966	The Burning Fiery Furnace	IV	Church parable	7	
1968	The Prodigal Son	IV	Church parable	11	
1973	Death in Venice	II	Full-Scale Opera	25	Melodic percussion used as separate orchestra. Intense symbolism, percussion expresses abstract psychological conflict of drama, Keyboards - other world.

The full-scale operas mark the beginning, the mid-point, and the end of this thirty-year period; the chamber operas occur in the first half of the period, and the even smaller-scale church parables occupy the last half of the period. The number of different percussion instruments increases within each genre. The instrumental types employed show a gradual change from the early reliance on the drums and unpitched instruments to the later emphasis on metallophones and melodic percussion. As the percussion section grew in size and began to be associated with different characters, two groups of instruments were juxtaposed: the membranophones and the metallophones. With their consecutive and heterophonic use in the church parables, this division began to disappear until, in the last opera, even the unpitched drums were used in a manner approximating the predominant melodic instruments.

The role of percussion in these works is therefore one of progress from the simple to the complex and from the realistic to the symbolic. Britten's exploratory use of different instruments, timbres, rhythms, and techniques transformed the percussion ensemble from its traditional function of support into a principal vehicle of dramatic expression.

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